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Keys to the Third Floor

How to Live Religious Life

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KEYS TO THE THIRD FLOOR

Dedicated to Our Mother in heaven

and my very own Mother and Sister on earth

COVER:
Saint Vincent de Paul Preaching to the Court of Louis XIII on Behalf of the Abandoned Children, Delaroche, 1823
The Immaculate Conception, Reni, 1627

All Scripture citations are taken from the Douay-Rheims, available freely at drbo.org.

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PREFACE

The definition of anything should state positively what the thing is, more clearly than the name of it does. In other words, it is not a definition to say what a thing is not. If you are told, for example, that a tangram is *not* a message received by trans-oceanic radio, you do not have a very clear idea that it is really a certain form of Chinese puzzle. There is no necessity for laboring the point that negative definitions do not give much information.

Having expounded that bit of obvious philosophic truth, we now proceed to give a negative description of what the present volume is about. First of all, it is not intended to be a scholarly treatise on the spiritual life. Many such works have been written by authors who are eminently competent to write them. Neither is this book intended to be a complete or exhaustive dissertation on the religious life or on the spiritual life. There are too many obvious and intentional omissions for it to boast of any such grandiose pretensions. For example, there is no treatment of the vows of poverty or chastity. The eschatological considerations, so important in the life of any Christian and any Religious, are conspicuous by their absence. There is nothing about death and Judgement, heaven or hell. Sin, as such, is not spoken of, nor is the virtue of mortification. There is no chapter on meditation and prayer, without which there can be no religious life. Most regretfully absent is any extended reference to the Blessed Mother of God, the patron and model of all Religious. Obviously, as a book on the spiritual life and the religious life, the present one is woefully lacking and incomplete.

On the positive side, however, a descriptive definition of this book might be: a practical treatment of the end and aims of the religious life. It attempts to present in an abbreviated form a picture of how the religious life should look in action. It is not so much a treatment of the means, as such, within the religious life, but rather the relation of the means to the end to be accomplished. All Religious are taught and know the place of the Blessed Virgin, of prayer,

of the sacraments, and of mortification in their lives. But the application of these things to daily living has been known to result in perplexity and confusion. Frequently, as in putting together a picture puzzle, while we may have all the pieces, somehow the picture does not seem to come out right. Thus, difficulties arise in our work and with our companions; untoward things happen to us, and somehow, the ideals and aspirations we had in chapel get lost when we face the reality of the day.

Such a situation is regrettable, the more so because it need not exist. It *must* not exist if we are to achieve the heights and the happiness to which God intends to lead us in our vocation. It is precisely in the midst of these struggles and these difficulties that God wishes us to love Him and to achieve sanctity. It is in these very circumstances in which we find ourselves, and in no other circumstances, that He intends us to be happy in loving and in serving Him.

This book, then, is a simple, down-to-earth, homely, if you will, explanation of the goal we are trying to reach in the religious life. It aims to point out with clarity that all the things we call acts of piety and religion, such as spiritual reading, the Little Office, the Rosary, and other devotional exercises, do not exist for their own sakes. However perfectly they may be performed, they do not constitute the perfection of the religious life, as many mistakenly believe. They are intended only to be the means to enable us to achieve the real and proper end of the religious life, to love God. These chapters might even be called a handbook of Christian living. But no matter what they are called, may it please God and His Blessed Mother, when we have finished them, that we have a clearer idea of how a Christian should act, and how a Christian really loves God. "By their fruits you shall know them."[1]

* * * * *

"Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but
to Thy name give glory."

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[1] Matt. 7:20, Psalm 113:9

1. About the Floors

The writer was approached at one time by a Sister with a problem. Sister had lived several years, apparently fruitful years and happy ones, in the religious life. In spite of this, her problem was that, unknown to those about her, she had not found the happiness she had expected. Life in the community was not all that she had hoped to experience. She was unable to phrase clearly exactly what she had looked forward to in religious life; but the reality certainly had not corresponded to her nebulous and idealistic expectancy. Much more than she had ever dreamed, she had found rampant in religious life petty human nature with all its faults and foibles. In addition, she felt she had been given too much work to do. It seemed to her that she had had much more time to pray while living in the world than she had ever found in religious life. Before entering the convent she had frequently felt a greater closeness to God than she since had been able to achieve. She was satisfied with her vocation and would never think of leaving her order, but she felt that there was something radically wrong, either with her or with convent life.

There was something wrong. For upon questioning her, it was discovered that the difficulty of this Sister was that she was living with a very wrong attitude toward the people and events and things about her. She had hoped to find happiness in the religious life; but, with her attitude at the time of the discussion, it is doubtful whether this Sister could have found happiness in any state; in the convent, or single or married out in the world. She had a right to expect hap-

piness, for God made us for happiness, whether we are in religion or not. He made us to be happy not only in heaven, but also to be happy on the way to heaven. There is a mistaken notion, much too prevalent, that life is a period of misery through which we have to pass in order to reach heaven. While it is true that we will never be completely happy on earth, nevertheless God intends us to be reasonably happy on the way to heaven, as well as supremely happy when we get there. If we are not happy now, something is wrong. God gave us His prescription for happiness. If we are not happy, like the Sister in question, we simply are not following the directions on the bottle.

What, then, are these directions? Well, God gave us a compact summary of all His rules for happiness in what are called the Beatitudes. And if we could summarize that summary in two words, perhaps no better words could be chosen than these: "Forget yourself." We cannot be unhappy unless we are thinking only of ourselves, unless we want something different from what actually is. We are unhappy because we fail to conform our will to God's will, because we are blindly willing and choosing in accordance with our own judgment what is good and best for us.

In other words, our happiness depends upon our aim in life. By that is here meant our habitual motivation for doing what we do and our characteristic way of judging and reacting to what happens to us. Let us put it this way. We may say that there are three floors in the human house. On the first floor, live those whose only aim in life is to *feel* good. Their primary objective in life is to have a good time. They live by sensuality. To a greater or lesser degree, the capital sins of gluttony and sloth are their masters. For example, if the food that is served does not please them, whether in what is served, the way it is cooked, or the amount they receive, they are unhappy. They are constantly watching the amount and type of work that others do. If they find that they are asked to do a little more than the others, then they are unhappy. If their free time is encroached upon, if their feelings are not constantly considered by others, they are unhappy. In

other words, when anything interferes with their aim of feeling good, they are sad.

On the second floor of the human house live those whose only aim in life is to *look* good. They want to be successful at any cost. Their aim is riches and reputation. They are motivated by the capital sins of pride, covetousness, and envy. Their goal is to be regarded as a success, to be popular, and to have a reputation among their fellow religious. If they are given work to do, and they think there is not much chance for success, or if the success will not be notable, or if it is the kind of work that is not in the public eye, or if it is hidden from the eyes of the community members, they are not likely to take the job, or they find ways to avoid it. Their only aim in life is to *look* good, and, when anything happens that interferes with their looking good, the result is anger. They get "mad."

On the third floor of the human house, live those whose aim in life is not to feel good, or to look good, but to *be* good. They live by the virtues of faith, hope, and charity. Their single aim in life is to do God's will, to live by faith and love. And no matter what happens to them, such people are always glad.

So, if we are unhappy it is because we are, to speak colloquially, either "mad or sad." Both of these states result from self-love. Incidentally, we might note that our own habitual disposition has a similar effect on others. We give to others what we have in ourselves. Depending on whether our aim in life is to *feel* good, *look* good, or *be* good, we are habitually either *mad*, or *sad*, or *glad*. If we are *mad*, we are giving others what we have in ourselves, the torments of hell. If we are *sad*, we go about with long faces, spreading gloom and giving others the grimness of purgatory. It is only the saintly, the truly good, the children of God, who are habitually happy. They give the glory of heaven to other people just by their presence. The glory of the parent is the happy child. They are happy children of God, giving Him glory and their neighbor happiness by their own life and happiness.

Our happiness, then, is not caused by people or things outside

us. It results from an improper attitude toward people and things. If we are unhappy, it is because we want to use people and things for our own praise, or profit, or pleasure, or power. If we are unhappy it is because we have the wrong aim in life. Our aim must not be to *feel* good, or to *look* good, but to *be* good. When this is our aim, we imitate Christ on the Cross as Christians should. He certainly did not *look* good, dying, spiked to a post between two thieves, with only a handful of His followers at His feet, a handful out of all those whom He had worked so hard for three years to teach and help. Again, He certainly did not *feel* good. We do not have to elaborate on that. But He *was* good, and that is what counted. He was good, because He was doing the will of God, His Father. "Not my will but thine be done" (Luke 22:42).

In this, the seeking of God's will in everything, lies essential goodness. It is, also, the only proved recipe for happiness. If we seek our own will in anything, we make ourselves liable to unhappiness. Happiness is not an end to be sought in itself, but rather a *result*. If we seek happiness for itself, we are bound to miss it. It will elude our grasp like the mythical pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. The closer we come, the farther away it recedes. Happiness comes as a result of making other people happy. It is a result of loving God and our neighbor. We will find from experience that we cannot spread happiness among others without splashing it all over ourselves. It is not a question of getting, but, more important, of giving.

It is not new to say that life is a matter of give and take. But again, to return to our figure of the human house, we may say that there are three floors in that house. On the first floor live those who take everything and give nothing except what they must. They are the selfish, who live by passion or feelings. On the second floor live those who both give and take. They do their duty, but they also demand everything that is coming to them. They must have all their rights respected. They are the coldly just, who live by natural virtue or reason. But on the third floor live those who try to give everything they possibly can and take only what is absolutely necessary. They

are the charitable, who live by faith. They are the unselfish. They do not love themselves inordinately, but they do love God and their neighbor, and they are, consequently, happy. For God made us to love Him and to love our neighbor, and we are happy only when we are fulfilling the purpose for which we were made.

Here is a point which bears emphasis. If a thing is to work well and achieve its purpose, it must be used according to the plan of its maker. Otherwise there will be disorder and damage. For example, imagine a bewildered savage on the shore of some Pacific isle stumbling upon a strange object, the like of which he had never seen. Actually, it is a fountain pen, but he does not know a fountain pen's use. In fact he does not even know how to write. But, by experiment, he discovers that the pen makes a wonderful instrument for picking the meat out of nuts. Now, for a while he may, more or less successfully, do that with the pen, but he destroys it as far as the purpose of its maker is concerned, writing. The inevitable result of the misuse of anything is damage and eventually destruction. Note, too, that ignorance of this principle does not at all avert the inexorable consequences. So it is with the Christian life. If any one, whether through ignorance or willfulness, misuses his Christian life, if he does not live it as God intended him to live it, namely, supernaturally, the inevitable result is unhappiness to a greater or lesser degree. And, of course, continued knowing and willful grave misuse will lead to eternal destruction. So we can see that it is only by living on the third or supernatural floor, forgetting ourselves and loving God and our neighbor, that we can be truly happy; for that is God's purpose in creating us.

Put another way, we can say that on the first floor of the human house dwell those who are motivated by the seven capital sins. Their standard of conduct is "what the crowd does." They drift along the line of least resistance, justifying their conduct by thinking that since it is good enough for so many others, it is good enough for them. On this point, it might be well to recall something that was found among the papers of Saint Bonaventure after his death. He

had written: "I have not entered religion to live as others live, but to live as they ought to live, according to the spirit of the institute and in perfect observance of the rules. That is why, on entering religion, I was given the rules to read and not the lives of others. I took them for the direction of the life I should lead. I ought to observe them all, even if I saw no one else observe them."

But to continue our analogy, on the second floor dwell those who live by reason and what they call common sense. Their standard of conduct is "what seems right to *me*." Each one is his own infallible authority. He pontificates himself on all matters as to what is good or bad for him and what he will do about it. It makes no difference whether the Church, or the Pope, or rules, or customs say differently, these people are the captains of their own souls and they play a game of being their own god.

On the third floor, dwell those who live by faith, by hope, and by charity. Their standard of conduct is not what the crowd does, not what seems right to their reason, but only what God wants. Faith rules here. On this floor live those who imitate Christ as He went about doing His Father's will. They do what God wants, and graciously accept what God sends them. These are the happy souls who follow the injunction of Christ, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His justice" (Matt. 6:33).

Now, here is a startling thought. Each of us habitually lives on one or the other of these three floors of passion, or reason, or faith. This is so because we are creatures of habit. We may occasionally *visit* on one or the other floors for a time, or for this or that particular action, but we have habitually set up housekeeping on only one of them. That is, we habitually act and judge from a motive of sensuality, or vainglory, or love of God. Our spontaneous and characteristic reaction to things and people and situations is dominated either by our feelings, or our reason, or our faith.[1]

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[1] Note: All of this is not to say that those who are living on the first or second floors are necessarily not essentially good, or that they do not have sanctifying grace in their souls. Actually, persons are structurally supernatural and holy if they

If we find that we have not attained the happiness that we expected to find in the religious life, it may be because we are living on the wrong floor. It might be revealing if each of us would consider soberly the following questions: Am I living on the first floor of selfishness or passion, where I judge everything that I do and everything that happens to me by my feelings? Am I living habitually on the second floor of reason or common sense, where I judge what I do and what happens to me by what seems right or just to me? Or am I living on the third floor, where I judge things in conformity with God's will through the light of faith? Is this what motivates and influences all of my actions, my decisions, my requests?

It is possible that some Religious, whether through ignorance, or, what is more likely, lack of clarity in their aims, and lack of specific knowledge of what they are about, are not sufficiently concerned with living on the proper floor. They try to live complacently down on the first floor of feeling, or on the second floor of reason, and make confused, sporadic attempts to ornament their homes with the gadgets and furnishings proper to the third floor. But they confuse the furnishings and décor with the apartment itself, as if throwing Persian rugs on the floors of a slum dwelling could somehow transform it into a Park Avenue penthouse. Thus, in all good faith, they really work hard at certain accidentals of the supernatural life, confusing them with the essentials. They fold their hands piously in chapel, and cast down their eyes. They walk with religious decorum and speak with modulated tones. They are scrupulous in saving four inches of thread after sewing, or, as the case may be, they clean and oil outdoor tools in the interest of Poverty. They are

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are in the state of grace, and this can be lost only by committing mortal sin. But to the extent that their motivation proceeds from feelings or mere natural reason, they are not functionally supernatural. They are not using their supernatural powers to their capacity. The purpose of the picturesque categorization is to make us realize to what extent our motivation is unworthy of what God expects of us, and how far we are from realizing the full possibilities for sanctity and happiness which are in the supernatural life which God has given us.

prompt at exercises, and would not think of speaking during the grand silence. They meticulously count their mortifications during the day, and how many times they went without butter or salt. They fold their habits each night precisely as prescribed in the rule, and they are always careful about asking for their permissions.

Now, be it noted, and noted well, that all these things are good. They are all part and parcel of the furnishings of a supernatural home on the third floor. But they do *not* constitute the essence of the religious life, nor of perfection, nor of the truly functional supernatural life. No amount of these furnishings amassed in the home of sensualism on the first floor, or in the home of reason on the second floor, will ever make those homes truly supernatural. And, by the same token, no amount of these furnishings will ever make a religious occupant of those homes truly happy. For down on those lower floors there is never present the peaceful and serene vista that spreads before the gaze of those who look down on life through the picture-window of God's penthouse of faith, who see things through God's eyes, and who want everything that God wants.

It is because of such confused attempts at living the religious life and the supernatural life that certain Religious experience many difficulties and problems. Because of mistaken aims, some Religious are not attaining the full measure of happiness which God intends they should have in this life. They are not completely fulfilling the purpose for which they were made, and are, consequently, to that degree, unhappy.

Perhaps there are some who are not habitually doing so now, who would be living happily on the supernatural third floor if only the way were pointed out a little more clearly. They would rush up eagerly, if only they were handed the keys to the doors, keys for which they have been fumbling, and which, unknown to themselves, they have had right at hand for lo! these many years. So, for those Religious, if such there be, who have been attempting to make a manor out of a mud hut, or who have been attempting to live a functionally supernatural life down on the lower floors of feeling or rea-

son by adding some of the furnishings of a home which is both structurally and functionally supernatural, an attempt will be made in the following pages to present them certain keys to the apartment on the third floor, keys which others have found helpful in opening the doors to true happiness in the religious life.

We will speak, first of all, of the nature of a supernatural person or Christian, and then of how a supernatural person should live. That is, we will treat of the structure of a Christian, and then of the functioning of a Christian, or of how a Christian acts when he is living on the third floor of faith, of hope, and of charity.

2. What is a Christian?

We know well, and often say glibly, that our destiny is heaven and the face-to-face vision of God. But it is worthy of consideration whether, when we say this, we have even an inkling of its tremendous implications. That a created being might see God, as He is, and know the Creator, as He knows Himself, is beyond the powers of created nature. It is a prerogative to which we have no right. It is a goal beyond our needs and aspirations and desires. It is a function for which our created nature has no capacity. In a word, it is supernatural.

We know that with the human nature which we have, a living, sentient, warm-blooded, oxygen-breathing body and spiritual soul, we cannot live for long under water. It is not of our nature. If a man wishes to stay for long periods under water, he must have special equipment—a diving bell or caisson or submarine. Again, with the human nature we have, a man cannot long survive above the earth's atmosphere. An aviator must equip himself with oxygen masks and pressurized cabins. In the same way, our human nature, as it is in itself, is in no way fitted to live the life of heaven. We just do not have the necessary equipment.

But God in His goodness has made possible our getting to and our living in heaven. He has given us that special equipment we need. On that Sunday afternoon, many years ago, when, as a gurgling infant, we were taken to our parish baptismal font, something tremendous happened to us, something more than the so-called

washing away of original sin. God actually gave us a new kind of life, a share in His very own life–supernatural life.

It was of this new life that He was speaking during His meeting with Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin, a secret follower of Christ who was afraid to acknowledge his friendship, and, consequently, was accustomed to visit him only after dark. Once when Our Lord was talking to Nicodemus, He said, "Unless a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Nicodemus scratched his head in confusion. That was really a puzzle. Unable to figure it out, he finally asked, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born again?" Now this was one of those times when Our Savior was speaking metaphorically. Seeing that His hearer misunderstood Him, He corrected him. He went on to say: "Amen, amen, I say to thee, unless a man be born again of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:4,5). We must, then, be born again. When we are born, we receive our natural life. When we are born again, we receive a new life, a spiritual life, supernatural life. One thing Our Divine Lord stressed while He was on earth was this notion of life. Time and again He spoke of it. "I came that they may have life and have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, you shall not have life in you" (John 6:54).

Now, just what does it mean when we say that we have supernatural life? What kind of thing is it? How is it that we are able to share in God's life? If we hope to penetrate this mystery even to the slightest degree, we must first consider the various kinds of life that we see on earth around us. Anyone who has thought about it at all realizes that life in any of its grades or forms is a tremendous thing. For example, the lowest form of life that exists is what is called vegetative or plant life. Yet the little daisy growing at the foot of the Rocky Mountains is, in the order of being, a more wonderful thing

than the whole Rocky Mountains. For they are just a big mass of rock and stone, minerals having no immanent activity. They will stay just where they are unless someone comes by with an atom bomb and moves them by violence. But the little daisy is a living thing. It has a life principle that gives it wonderful activities within itself. It can take in nourishment, grow, and reproduce itself. However, while it has all these activities flowing from its life principal, it still is limited. There are many things which the daisy cannot do. For example, the daisy cannot say to itself, "My, it's hot out here under the sun. I think I'll move over there into the shade." It cannot do this because it does not have the kind of life principle which gives it the activities of sensation and appetite.

But there is a higher kind of life than that which belongs to the daisy. This type of life belongs to the cow that eats the daisy. The cow has a different life principle from the daisy, which, therefore, gives it certain different activities. It can do everything that the daisy can do, that is, take in nourishment, grow, and reproduce itself. But in addition to these, it has other activities. It can see, hear, touch, taste, smell. Because the cow has an essentially different and essentially higher life principle from the daisy, it has essentially different and essentially higher activities. The point is that each essentially different and essentially higher life principle brings essentially different and essentially higher activities. Again, although the cow has this superior life principle, it, too, is limited. There still are activities which it cannot perform. For example, the cow cannot say to herself, "Milk isn't bringing too good a price; I think I will go on strike until the market goes up." She does not possess that kind of life. In other words, the activities of a being are limited by the kind of life principle or nature that it has.

Now, as wonderful as is sentient or animal life, there is a still higher type of life on earth, the kind of life which belongs to the farmer who owns the cow that eats the daisy. The farmer has a different life principle from the daisy and the cow, and this different life principle allows him different activities. He can do everything

that the plant can do: take in nourishment, grow, and reproduce himself. He can do everything that the animal can do: see, hear, taste, touch, smell. But he can also do things which are proper to his type of life alone. He can know and will. This is the highest type of life known on earth. We call it rational or human life.

It is with this kind of life that we are born, But Our Divine Lord said that this kind of life is not enough for us: With this kind of life alone, we cannot fulfill our destiny and get to heaven. He said that we need a new kind of life, a higher kind of life. We must be raised to a higher level of being. We must be re-born. This happened to us when we were baptized. At that time there was infused into our soul a new life principle, a supernatural life principle, which raised us up from the level of mere human beings and made us supernatural. This new life principle we call sanctifying grace.

To try to understand the magnitude of this, let us try to conceive an incredible analogy. Let us imagine that a man had a dog which he loved so much that he wanted to adopt it into his family and make it his heir. Of course, he could not do that because it is a dog, and not of the same nature as man. A man can legally only adopt another human being. But suppose, *per impossible*, that the man were able to give the dog, not a blood transfusion, but part of his own very life, so that the dog, while still remaining an animal, would become in some way human. He could now do whatever a man could do, live as a human lives, speak as he speaks, love the things that a man loves, know what a man knows. In other words, he would live the life of the adopting man, sit at table with him, read the papers, talk over the days' problems, and become heir to the man's fortune.

Of course, this would be impossible for a man to do. He cannot share his nature with another being. Yet, God did just that for us at our baptism. He gave us this new life principle which we call sanctifying grace that lifts us up from the level of mere human beings, so that now we are in a certain way divine, sharing in the very nature of God. "...so that through them (Christ's glory and power) you may

become partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4).

Now, it was said that each kind of life had its own special activities. A new kind of life results in new activities. Sanctifying grace is a new life. Therefore, it must have activities which are proper to it. What, then, can those do who have received this new life in baptism that those without it cannot do? What are the activities proper to this divine life that we share? Since it is a share in the life of God, therefore we must participate in some way in those activities which are proper to God alone. And this is precisely what we do.

First, we share in the knowledge of God. We know God *as He knows Himself*, by the virtue of the faith which is infused into us at baptism. "Now this is everlasting life, that they may know thee, the only true God, and him whom thou hast sent, Jesus Christ" (John 17:3). So, we can know that there are three divine Persons in God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We can know that God is our Father, that Christ is our Brother, and Mary our Mother. This knowing of God as He truly is, is realized in this life only in a dark manner, as St. Paul says, through faith, but one day we will be able to see Him exactly as He is, face to face. The infinite then will be comprehended *as* infinite by the finite according to its finite capacity. But this knowing of God as He is in Himself is something that is above all the powers of human nature and human reason. The philosophers can tell us nothing from reason about the nature, or even the existence of the Most Blessed Trinity. We need the help of supernatural life and its power of faith to comprehend this awesome truth.

Secondly, because of this new life principle and the virtue of hope which accompanies it, we can act with the power of God. This of course, does not mean that we can perform supernatural works such as miracles. But it means that we can overcome the power of the devil and his temptations and avoid the things which interfere with our reaching God. By the infused virtue of hope we are enabled and given courage to strive to reach God in spite of all obstacles. "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believ-

ing, that you may abound in hope and in the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:13). Without grace, this is impossible to our human nature.

Thirdly, with this new life principle, we are given the power to love, as God loves, both God Himself and our neighbor. God loves Himself because of His own intrinsic goodness and lovableness. So, with grace we receive the power to love God for Himself and His own goodness, without thought of what He has done or will do for us. We receive the power to love God supernaturally and unselfishly, because of Himself. Regarding the love of our fellow men, God loves them all, universally, without exception. And so, by reason of the infused virtue of charity, we are given the power to love all men universally, which is impossible to unaided human nature. It was Chesterton who summed up all this by saying that in baptism we receive the power to believe the unbelievable, to hope for the hopeless, and to help the helpless.

Finally, as a result of our new life, we receive power to enjoy the very happiness of God, Himself. We first are enabled to earn our share of that happiness by performing supernatural, meritorious actions. All our actions done in the state of grace and done for God are supernatural and meritorious actions because they proceed from a supernatural principle. The philosophers tell us that an action is specified by the principle from which it proceeds. The actions of a dog are animal actions because they proceed from an animal principal, or nature. Actions which proceed from a supernatural principle are supernatural actions. These supernatural actions merit for us, by the goodness of God, a supernatural reward. Ultimately, in heaven, we will enjoy that reward, earned by virtue of this supernatural life in us from baptism.

It is clear now how it can be said that through grace we share in God's nature. It is not as if God were to whittle off little chunks of His nature and distribute them. Rather, we are said to share in His nature because we are able to perform actions which are proper to Him alone. If we could share the ability to fly as birds do, we might

be said to share in the nature of a bird. So, by sharing with God the capacity for acts which only He can perform, we are said to be sharers of the divine nature. To enable us to do these things, God has created and infused into our souls this new life principle which we call the supernatural life, or sanctifying grace.

This, then, is our tremendous dignity as Christians. We have this supernatural life, a share in the very life of God, Himself. Along with it, moreover, comes another amazing privilege. God adopts us as His very own children. He has revealed this to us, Himself. "But to as many as received him he gave the power of becoming sons of God: ...who were born...of God" (John 1:12 ff). "...you have received a spirit of adoption as sons, by virtue of which we cry, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit, Himself, gives testimony to our spirit that we are sons of God" (Rom. 8:15,16). "He predestined us to be adopted through Jesus Christ as his sons, according to the purpose of his will" (Eph. 1:5). "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God, and such we are" (1 John 3:1).

In an earlier example, we saw that for adoption there is needed a likeness of nature between the one adopting and the adopted. For that reason a man could not adopt a dog. In order to adopt us, God has remedied the discrepancy of nature by raising us up to a supernatural level and giving us a nature like to His. But there are still other conditions for human adoption. It is necessary that the one adopting do it freely, and that the one adopted receive the right to the inheritance of the adopter. Again, we see these conditions fulfilled perfectly in God's adoption of us. He has freely chosen to adopt us, and when He does, we receive a right to His inheritance, namely, the glory of heaven. For it is written, "If we are sons, we are heirs also: heirs indeed of God and joint heirs with Christ..." (Rom. 8:17). By nature, then, we are creatures of God. By adoption, we are the children of God. As His children, we receive different food from the servants of God, for He feeds us with the precious bread of the most holy Eucharist.

Marvelous as all this is, it still is not all we share. At our baptism, and as long as we remain in the state of grace, God, Himself, actually dwells within us. "If anyone love me," says Our Lord, "he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him" (John 14:23). While the three divine Persons actually dwell in us, this divine indwelling is attributed in a special way to the Most Holy Spirit. Thus it is written: "If you love me, keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father and he will give you another Advocate to dwell with you forever, the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you shall know him, because he will dwell with you and be in you" (John 14:15-17) . "Hope does not disappoint, because the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom. 5:5). "But if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, then he who raised Jesus Christ from the dead will also bring to life your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who dwells in you" (Rom. 8:11).

This indwelling of God in us is something unique. Actually, God is in all created things in several ways: He is in things by His power, because all things are subject to His dominion; He is also in things by His essence, because He created all things and keeps them in being and movement; and, finally, He is in created things by His knowledge, because He sees all things and knows all things. But His indwelling in a person in the state of grace is a very special thing. It is separate and distinct from sanctifying grace, although it always accompanies it. Sanctifying grace is a created life principle which God infuses into our soul, whereas the divine indwelling is God, Himself, actually present in some mysterious way in our soul and body. He revealed this to us by calling it dwelling as in a temple. St. Paul wrote: "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone destroys the temple of God, him will God destroy; for holy is the temple of God, and this temple you are" (1 Cor. 3:16,17). In another place he writes: "Or do you not know that your members are the temple of the Holy Spirit,

who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?" (1 Cor. 6:19). Thus it is that ours is the unspeakable privilege of having God, Himself, constantly with us when we are in the state of grace.

To sum up, then, our structure as a Christian: at baptism we received a new life principle called sanctifying grace, which enables us to participate in the nature of God, Himself, by performing actions which are proper to God, alone. We perform these actions through the power of the infused virtues of faith, hope, and charity. In addition to being re-born or regenerated, God adopts us as His very own children, and the three divine Persons actually come and dwell within us as in a temple. All of this we believe as part of the infallible teaching of the Church.

From what has been said, we can gather a faint glimmer of our great dignity as Christians. So great is this dignity in the eyes of God that He sacrificed His only Son to give it to us, and His Son immolated Himself that we might receive it. Therefore, we should be supremely conscious of our Christian glory. Unfortunately, it often has no real place in our thoughts. For example, we are conscious of the great difference between a man and an insect. It is part of our thinking. In our mind's eye we would never think of them as being similar. Yet the gap between the grades of life of an insect and a man is, after all, measurable in a way, because they are both in the natural order. But the gap between a natural man and a supernatural man is infinitely greater and immeasurable, because one is natural and the other is supernatural. The reason we are not so conscious of this difference is that exteriorly it generally is not discernible.

To help us realize somewhat the great difference between a natural, unregenerated man and a man in the state of grace, let us look at two such men. These men are both employed at a university. The first is a cultured, middle-aged professor of science. His brilliant mind commands a high salary, and everyone points to him as a success in life. He is neat, handsome, and has all the social graces that would make him acceptable in society. His company is pleasant and

he is frequently invited to speak at public affairs.

On the same campus, in a small shack, lives another man, an elderly hunchback, living out his few remaining years. He earns but a few dollars a week and wears cast-off clothes. Because he is a foreigner, conversation with him is difficult, and his company is sought by no one. From his uncultured mind there comes forth nothing of much use to the outside world.

There, then, is the sketchy picture of these two men. Naturally, you might say that the polished professor was at the top of the ladder, while the hunchback was lost in the rubble at the bottom. Yet, in the eyes of God their positions are completely reversed; for the cultured scientist has never been baptized. Indeed, he proclaims that he does not believe in God. He lives on a merely natural level. He has, to an eminent degree, everything that belongs to him as a man, but not one speck more. He has a will and a brilliant intellect. Yet, in his present state he can do nothing that will merit heaven or enable him to see God. He is in no way fulfilling the purpose of his existence. But the poor little hunchback, a daily communicant, through his baptism has been lifted by God to a plane which the scientist can never reach through his own powers. He is a royal prince in the court of God, Himself. He is able to perform supernatural acts whose effects will echo through all eternity, works that are infinitely more valuable than anything the scientist can do. Whether the poor man shovels walks, or washes windows, or sweeps corridors, those simple acts are greater things in the eyes of God than anything the scientist may do, even if he should discover another H-bomb, for the poor man is living with the life of God and working with the power of God, while the scientist, as far as supernatural life is concerned, is dead. The little cripple, whom one would pass on the street without a glance, is alive and vibrant, living with the very life of God, Himself, and ready at any moment to move on to the happiness of heaven.

Here lies hidden a tremendous thought which should be pointed out. Supernatural life, or sanctifying grace, is necessary for the

soul to get to heaven. We know this with the certainty of faith from Our Lord, Himself. Hence, at any given moment, each person on earth either has this supernatural life or he does not have it. If he dies at that moment, he is either saved or lost. There are the alternatives. And being in the state of grace, or possessing the supernatural life at the moment of death, is the only thing that determines whether our life on earth has been a success or not.

It is in the light of the supernatural life in our souls that we see the stark horror of mortal sin. To try to picture the damage it does to our supernatural life, imagine, if you will, a man standing at the top of the Empire State Building. It is night, and about him at his feet sprawls the great city of New York, pulsing with life. Lights blink out from the windows of office buildings. More lights glitter in dance-halls and stores and churches. Galaxies of lights flash on and off on theater marquees and night clubs. Hundreds of buses and automobiles snake along through the darkness. All is bustle and brightness and busyness. Now, imagine that this man has at his hand a master switch controlling all the electricity in New York City. Suddenly, with one movement he pulls the switch and instantly plunges the city into darkness. Trains stop, elevators stop, sign lights stop moving. All light disappears. There is at once inactivity and unholy stillness.

Now, sanctifying grace can be compared to the current in all those wires that kept things moving. The wires looked the same while the life-giving current was coursing through them and after it was shut off. But what a difference in the effect when the current was gone. So it is with grace in the soul. We look the same before and after mortal sin, but what a difference! Mortal sin pulls the master switch. Immediately there follow darkness, inactivity, and death. All accumulated merit is wiped out. Our right to heaven is lost. The soul is in desolation.

This sin is called mortal because it kills the life of the soul. It fouls God's plan for us. As far as fulfilling the purpose of our existence is concerned, in mortal sin we can accomplish nothing. No

merit whatsoever can be gained. A person living in mortal sin is like a man who works hard all week and forgets to punch the time-clock. At the end of the week, there is no record of his work in the office, so he gets no pay. St. Augustine says that as the soul is the life of the body, so God is the life of the soul. If the soul goes, the body dies; and if God goes, the soul dies.

God has given us this supernatural life which we call grace, and His purpose in giving it to us is that we might grow and increase in it. Perhaps it is unfortunate that the possession of supernatural life has come to be known as "being in the state of grace." As a result of that word *state*, too many people come to regard it as a sort of static state into which we get when we go to confession, must remain in until we receive Holy Communion the following morning, and in which we hope to die. They are like a certain fabulous Mrs. X. who had a bitter enemy. One Saturday afternoon on her way from confession, Mrs X. met her enemy on the street. Straightway, she walked up to her and shook her finger in her face and said, "I'll not fight with you now, because I've just come from confession and I'm in the state of grace. But with God's help I won't always be in the state of grace, and then watch out!"

Of course, this is a totally wrong concept. Grace is not a quiescent state, but a life to be lived. God gave us this life that we might live it. Our whole purpose on earth is to grow in and increase the supernatural life within us. "For this is the will of God, your sanctification" (1 Thess. 4:3). "For it is written, 'you shall be holy, because I am holy'" (1 Pet. 1:16). That is the business that we should be about. It is for this alone that a Christian should live. Yet, many parents feed their children cereal so they will develop their muscles, send them to school so they will develop their brains, but all the while completely forget or ignore the development of their supernatural life. Consequently, instead of growing, the children remain spiritual midgets, dwarfs. They are almost like infants who have supernatural life, but in whom it does not operate actively. In such beings, the supernatural life is dormant, inactive, atrophied.

Yet, it is the amount, or degree, or intensity of the supernatural life that we have developed in us at the moment of death that determines our capacity to enjoy the happiness of heaven. As we know, there will be varying degrees of sharing in the happiness of God. Our Lord said, "In my Father's house there are many mansions. Were it not so, I should have told you, because I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2). Every one will be perfectly happy in heaven, yet some will be more happy than others, because they will have a greater capacity for happiness. A classic explanation of this seeming contradiction is the Little Flower's illustration of the thimble and the pail. Take a thimble and a pail and fill them both completely to the top with water. Neither can hold another drop. Yet, the pail has a much greater capacity to hold water than the thimble. To use another example, suppose a young man takes a girl to a football game. She has an ecstatic time. She delights in the bands and music and banners and fur coats and chrysanthemums and the cheering crowds. But she does not know whether football is the game in which you hit a ball with a stick or in which you run with it. On the other hand, the young man enjoys all the accidentals as much as she does. He likes the band and music and crowds. But in addition, he understands all the technicalities of the football game and the fine play. They are both looking at and taking part in the same spectacle, and are both having a wonderful time. Yet, he has a much greater capacity to enjoy what presents itself to him than she has. So it will be in heaven. We will all be in the presence of God, Himself, our intellect in the presence of infinite truth, and our will in the presence of infinite good. But our capacities for enjoying the presence of God will be limited by the extent to which we have developed the supernatural life within us on earth. 'That is why sanctifying grace is called the *semen gloriae*, the seed of glory, the beginning of heaven on earth.

To this have we been called—to be Christians, to live and grow in the supernatural life, to be supernatural beings. Since; then, we are called to live a supernatural life the question presents itself: how do we do it? How do we grow in supernatural life? In answer to this,

staying in the sphere of generalities for the moment, we can say that there are two ways in which we may do this. The first way has to do with God. He does most of the work. The second way has to do with us. We do most of the work, always understanding, of course, the indispensable help we get from Him, without whom we can do nothing.

The first way that we grow in the supernatural life is through the Mass and the sacraments. The sacraments are the channels, the main pipelines which Christ instituted to pour this life into our souls. From receiving them in the right dispositions, we receive a tremendous increase in sanctifying grace. Consequently, we can see the necessity of frequent reception of the sacraments and of taking part in the Mass. It is not a question of choice. Our Lord said, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, you shall not have life in you" (John 6:54).

The second way of growing in the supernatural life can be summed up briefly by saying that it consists in imitating Christ in our lives. He alone lived perfectly the life that is, at once, part human and part divine. He came, not only to redeem us, but to give us an example of how to live. "For I have given you an example, that as I have done…so you also should do." (John 13:15).

Now, what were the outstanding characteristics of the life of Our Divine Savior? If we were to sum up the life of Christ in two virtues which He practiced, perhaps it would be most correct to say that those two virtues were His obedience and His love. So, our imitation of Christ will be prominently concerned with our imitation of these two virtues. It was said of Him, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, to accomplish His work" (John 4:34). Again, "I do always the things that are pleasing to Him" (John 8:29). And again, "Yet not my will but thine be done" (Luke 22:42). Hence, in order to live the supernatural life, we must imitate Christ in fidelity to the duties of our state in life. We must be obedient to the commandments of God, to the Church, to our rule, to our superiors, and to legitimate authority. We must do what we have to do, when we have

to do it, in the way God wants us to do it.

Secondly, we must imitate Christ in His love. Now, there were three things which Christ loved which were unheard of, unpracticed, and untaught throughout the world before His coming, three things which are distinctly Christian and supernatural actions. These three things are: love of the poor; love of the cross; love of one's enemies.

Love of the poor. When we speak of loving the poor, immediately there comes to mind the financially poor. However, there are many kinds of poor more numerous than the financially poor, kinds that put a greater tax on our love. For example, there are the mentally poor. They are those who lack truth, those not having the true faith, the ignorant, the slow, the dull, the stupid, the mistaken, the people who always say the wrong thing. Then there are the poor in will, or the spiritually poor. They are those who lack virtue, who do not have charity, justice, temperance. They are the sinners, the criminals, those with noticeable public faults. There are the physically poor, the sick, the weak, those chronically ailing, those lacking strength and beauty and grace of movement, the clumsy, the homely. There are the socially poor, those of races and nationalities that are looked down upon, foreigners, those from "the wrong side of the tracks," those whose ancestors, perhaps, did not "come over on the Mayflower." Finally, there are the financially poor, those lacking in the necessities of life, those not having a sufficiency of food, clothing, and shelter. It was with all these kinds of poor that Our Divine Lord constantly associated Himself. He went about doing good to all men, but showed an especial love for the poor.

Love of the cross. By the cross is meant all those disagreeable things which God permits to come into our lives through no fault of our own. Our cross may be sickness, criticism, lack of beauty, talent, popularity, success, and so on. Christ and Mary welcomed the Cross. He said, "Not my will but thine be done" (Luke 22:42). "Into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46). "Behold the handmaid of the Lord," said the Maid of Nazareth, "be it done to me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38). Our Lord told us very clearly, "He who does

not take up his cross, and follow me, is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:38).

Love of one's enemies. The great example of this, of course, is Christ crying out from the Cross the plea for His enemies, "Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). He told us that we must love our enemies. "But I say to you, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute and calumniate you…" (Matt. 5:44). Again, "But if you do not forgive men, neither will your Father forgive you your offenses" (Matt. 6:15).

So, then, in order to live the spiritual life and the supernatural life, we must imitate Christ in His threefold love of the poor, the cross, and our enemies. This was to be the real test of the followers of Christ. "By their fruits you will know them" (Matt. 7:20). "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matt. 12:34). Again, He said, "By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). "A new commandment I give you: that you love one another, that as I have loved you, you also love one another" (John 13:34). Christ's love was universal. It embraced all men without exception. So, too, must our love be universal, excepting no one, if we are to live the supernatural life in imitation of Christ.

In the matter of imitating the love of Christ, we should bear in mind that there are three grades of love, good, better, and best. We must strive at least for the good. Any other attitude would be rebellious and downright sinful. The attitude of the good grade of love is resignation. For example, if you like certain persons only a little, or, at very least, are not actively opposed to them, you are considered resigned to their presence. You put up with them. So, the merely *good* Christian is at least resigned to the poor, the cross, and his enemies. He does not rebel against them; he puts up with them. On the other hand, there is the attitude of the *better* Christian. If there are persons who attract us, whose company we enjoy, we are happy when they are about. So, the *better* Christian is cheerful when there

is an opportunity to love the poor, the cross, and his enemies. Finally, there is the *best* Christian. If there are persons whom we love very much, we are sad when they are absent, and we go looking for them. So the *best* Christian goes out of his way to look for the poor, the cross, and his enemies in his love of them. The *best* Christians are the real saints. But before we can strive to be better or best, we must be sure that at least we are good, that we never rebel against the presence of the poor, the cross, and our enemies.

All this in broad, bold strokes is the way we grow in the supernatural life, in holiness and in sanctity, in likeness to Christ, in happiness. It is for this that we are striving in the religious life. Let us put it down in outline form to impress it on our minds.

Growth in the supernatural life comes through:

1) Mass and frequent reception of the sacraments, and prayer.
2) Imitation of Christ in:
    A) His obedience to the duties of His state in life.
    B) His love of:
        a) the poor
        b) the Cross
        c) His enemies

The remaining chapters of this book will be devoted to discussion of the individual points of this of this outline in detail. By living our lives in this way, we will move up from the mediocrity of the first and second floors and live the true supernatural life on the third floor. We will begin to realize how much genuine happiness we have been missing in our lives. We will become saints and thus fulfill our calling. “This is the will of God, your sanctification” (1 Thess. 4:3). “You therefore are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). As the Holy Father, Pope Pius XI, has said, “No one in these times has a right to take refuge in mediocrity.” If no one has this right, then certainly Religious, of all people, do not have it.

3. Obedience

When we speak of imitating Christ in His obedience and His threefold love, it is the equivalent of saying that we should practice the Beatitudes. For the practice of the Beatitudes encompasses the whole of Christian perfection. They are Our Lord's summary of His rules for Christian living and for happiness.

According to St. Thomas Aquinas, the purpose of the first three Beatitudes is to remove what he calls the obstacles to happiness. Paradoxically, the thing that interferes with our happiness is the seeking of our own will. It is the desire to look good, to have riches and reputation, and the desire to feel good, to enjoy sensible comfort and pleasure. To these obstacles to happiness, the desire for riches, reputation, and pleasure, fostered in us by original sin and nourished by the seven capital sins, Our Divine Lord opposed His first three Beatitudes or rules for happiness. The first three Beatitudes correspond to the same obstacles that we, as Religious, aim to overcome by our vows of poverty and chastity. They are positive statements of the rewards that will be ours if we practice these virtues.

The first obstacle to the attaining of true happiness, according to St. Thomas, is the inordinate desire for possessions and riches, honors and reputation. These desires are fed by the capital sins of pride, envy, and covetousness. To this obstacle Christ opposed the first Beatitude, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3). To make certain that Religious would practice this Beatitude and rid themselves of inordinate desire for

possessions, the founders of religious communities ruled that their members take a vow of poverty.

The next obstacle to true happiness, says St. Thomas, is the inordinate operation of our irascible appetites. When something interferes with our attaining of riches or reputation, the result is anger. So, to control these movements of anger and desire for revenge, Christ gave us the second Beatitude, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the earth" (Matt. 5:4).

Next in the obstacles to true happiness is the excessive desire for sensual pleasure, the desire to have comfort, sensible satisfactions, a good time. These desires are fed by the capital sins of gluttony, sloth, and lust. To these desires, Our Divine Lord opposed the third Beatitude, "Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matt. 5:5). To mourn, in this sense, according to St. Thomas, means to be without pleasure. As a means to help us practice the third Beatitude, the founders of our communities have given us the second vow, that of chastity.

Since it is true that the great majority of the spiritual problems of fervent Religious do not fall within the realm of poverty or chastity, there will be given here no specific treatment of those virtues. Problems, if such there be, involving the vow of poverty or chastity are of such a nature that their solutions are generally as clear as they must be drastic.

So, we pass quickly to our first point, the imitation of Christ in His obedience to the duties of His state in life. Obedience is the first step on the way to the practice of positive perfection. Once we have removed the obstacles to happiness, the desire for riches, reputation, and pleasure, or our concern for things and opinions of others, we come out, so to speak, of the purgative way and begin the positive seeking for perfection. Our efforts are concentrated, not so much on removing vices and obstacles to virtue, as on the systematic acquiring of virtue. The thing which interferes here is our own wayward will, which naturally rebels at obedience. To this desire to have our own way, Christ opposed the fourth Beatitude, "Blessed are they

who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be satisfied" (Matt. 5:6). Hungering and thirsting for justice, says St. Thomas, means doing one's duty, particularly to one's neighbor, as part of one's duty toward God. By this Beatitude, we do our duty, and, in the perfection of the Beatitude, do it ardently, as a hungry and thirsty man eats and drinks ardently. So, the fourth Beatitude is concerned with the doing of one's duty.

Now, a great part of our duty as Religious consists in the practice of the virtue of obedience, to which we are, also, vowed. The truth that obedience does great violence to our own will needs no elaboration. If there is one thing certain about living a religious life, it is that it may be summed up as obedience. This is tantamount to saying that the religious life means we must give up our own will. So true is this, that certain religious communities take only one vow, that of obedience. It is assumed in these communities that since poverty and chastity are the will of the superiors, their obligations are included in the vow of obedience. Now, it is true that the obligation of the vow of obedience does not necessarily extend to every action of the day, but only to grave commands which are directly specified by the Superior as being under the obligation of the vow. Nevertheless, the frame of reference of the virtue of obedience is all inclusive. By reason of the virtue, we owe obedience to our Superiors, to our constitutions, to our common rules, and to our order of day.[1]

The reason that obedience to any of the sources mentioned frequently seems so difficult and so hard to us is that we are not living on the third floor of the human house. If we are living down on the first floor of sensuality, we judge things only by our feelings. We do

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[1] The aim of the present book is to inculcate and encourage the positive seeking of the perfection of the virtues it proposes. Hence, it would be alien to its purpose and beyond its scope to enter into an explanation of the various degrees of lightness or gravity of sins or imperfections against either the vow or the virtue of obedience. However, some knowledge of these distinctions should be part of the equipment of every Religious. For those who are interested in acquiring such kno-

not *feel* like obeying the Superior or doing the thing which our duty demands. Consequently, in doing it we are unhappy. Or, if we are living on the second floor, judging things purely by reason, we cannot see why it is reasonable that we should obey this certain Sister in this specific instance, or why she should ask us to do this especial thing.

It is only when we are habitually living on the third floor of faith that we realize that we obey only because our Superiors represent God. Only then are we happy in obeying; for in obeying them, we obey God, Himself. He has placed them over us. On the second floor of reason, one person is as good as another, and our human dignity commands us not to be subject to another. But as soon as we know by faith that God says, "This person represents Me," the picture changes. And so, we obey not because the Superior is wise, or talented, or virtuous, or experienced, or naturally likable, but because God is in her. When we receive a telegram, we do not scrutinize the features of the messenger, nor the cut and fit of his uniform. We have concern, not for him, but only for the message which he brings. In the same way, if we are living on the third floor of faith, the instruments God uses to deliver His message to us will not distract us from the content of the message.

Undoubtedly, there are, thank God, many good Religious who are utterly convinced of this fact. In what other way can we account for the great degree of virtue practiced by highly intelligent Religious who often spend the greater part of their religious life humbly obedient and submissive to a Superior or Superiors who are not remarkable for good judgment, wisdom, or even virtue. Acquiescence for such a subject often involves the practice of deep virtue, and

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wledge, both of the moral and ascetical aspects of the three vows of religion, there is a very excellent and very thorough work available, *Follow Me*, by Bernard Fennelly, C.S.Sp., distributed by Burns Oates and Washburn. It cannot be recommended too highly. The author treats the vows of religion fully, from the moral, canonical, and ascetical aspects, and directs his main effort toward showing the grandeur of the vows as a liberating, not a restricting, force.

God, who will not be outdone in generosity by His creatures, will surely reward handsomely such faithful sons and daughters. He, alone, knows the struggle to be obedient that takes place in their hearts, and their faithful obedience brings joy to His heart.

We hear that our obedience should be blind. We are urged to practice blind obedience. But actually, obedience is anything but blind. It is most clearsighted. Obedience has, or should have, x-ray vision. It should see through our religious Superior to God and be blind to the Superior's faults and weaknesses and limitations, and even sins. The framework of obedience can even be considered as a sort of sacrament, a daring comparison which one writer suggests, for it invests a human person with divine authority. As in a sacrament, the outward appearances of the Superior remain poor and weak and mortal; yet, these outward appearances contain God, just as under the appearances of common bread and wine there is contained the Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is a tragedy that there are some unhappy souls living on the lower floors who go through the motions of being obedient, doing always what they are told, but who spoil the virtue of obedience by grumbling and murmuring and criticizing, either to themselves or others. They manage to take out an insurance policy on their own will. They must do the thing they are ordered to do, and they do do it; but the essence of obedience, submission, is not present. They criticize the Superior, they criticize the order given, its wisdom, or need, or legitimacy. They apparently reason that thus they collect an insurance premium by saving the face of their own pride, their own will, and self-respect. They remind one of youngsters we see sometimes with a small paper bag of candy. The child stretches out her arm to offer some to a playmate. When the playmate reaches her hand in, the first girl, to be sure that she does not get too much, squeezes the bag until it is almost impossible to extract any. The Religious in question are like that. On the morning of their vows, supposedly they offered their complete will to Almighty God, to do with as He wanted. When God takes them at their word and begins to

make use of their will through the orders of their Superior, or their order of day or duty, they immediately squeeze the bottom of the bag so that God cannot get that piece of their will that He is asking for at that moment. They do not heed the warning of St. Paul: "Do all things without murmuring and without questioning" (Phil. 2:14).

The perfecting part of obedience is that it does such violence to our own will, which is what stands in the way of our service to God and our own happiness. This fact was well illustrated by a clerical member of a religious community who was relating an incident of his boyhood. On an evening when he was especially hungry, for some reason supper was late. When it was finally announced, in his anxiety to eat he dashed for the table, tipping over a chair in his headlong rush. He ignored the overturned chair, continued to the table, and sat down. His father, with calm and determined authority, told him to return and pick up the chair. But his own will asserted itself, and he would not obey. As punishment, the father sent him to bed without his supper. Hungry as he was, he submitted rather than change his will about picking up the overturned chair. Later, in the night, at about eleven o'clock, his father came into his room and asked if he were ready to go out and pick up the chair, and then have something to eat. By this time, the pangs of hunger gnawing his stubborn, boyish will had so weakened it that he relented. Sheepishly, he went out to the chair which still lay overturned as he had left it, picked it up, and then foraged for what was available in the ice box.

The priest climaxed the telling of this incident by saying that the experience had done him good. It had taught him the danger and suffering involved in stubbornly clinging to his own will. He added, "Then I grew up and joined a religious community, and I have been picking up chairs ever since!" So, we see that not only faith, but even sad experience and reason can show us the wisdom of obedience.

The only ultimate motive for being obedient and diligent in the performance of the duties of our state in life is that we may imitate

Christ and, thereby, live the supernatural life. Thus we reap the happiness that God intends to come from the practice of obedience, not only in this life, but in heaven. Our Lord Himself was a paragon of obedience. He constantly referred to His coming on earth as a work which flowed from obedience. In the Holy Family, the order of authority that we would naturally expect is completely reversed. We find the higher in dignity subject to and obedient to the lower. The Blessed Mother was obedient to St. Joseph, and Christ was obedient to both Mary and Joseph.

Time after time we read in the Scriptures of the obedience of Christ, not only in St. Luke's Gospel of His childhood, but particularly in St. John, who stated that he was writing the gospel story of the divinity of Christ. He records, one after the other, words of Christ which emphasize His intense devotion to obedience. "I do always the things that are pleasing to him" (John 8:29). "The things, therefore, that I speak, I speak as the Father has bidden me" (John 12:50). "The word which you have heard is not mine, but the Father's who sent me" (John 14:24). "...that the world may know that I love the Father, and that I do as the Father has commanded me" (John 14:31). "Even as thou hast sent me into the world, so I also have sent them into the world" (John 17:18). And St. Paul sums up the whole life of Christ by saying: "He humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even to death on a cross" (Phil. 2:8). So, when Our Lord asks us for obedience, He knows whereof He asks. He is asking us to do nothing that He did not first do, Himself.

As Religious, we must constantly remind ourselves that imitation of Christ in His obedience to the duties of His state in life necessitates our conforming not only to specific and particular commands of our Superiors, but also to the prescriptions of our rules and constitutions, and our performing conscientiously the hour-by-hour tasks that are ours in our particular duty or mission, however difficult, unpleasant, or time-consuming they may be.

Here is a point that sometimes causes difficulty. It was one of the problems which worried the Sister referred to at the beginning

of this book. Because of the amount and nature of the work she was given, she felt that she did not have enough time to pray. Perhaps this is something which, in our quiet moments, worries many of us. How can we become more perfect, more holy, how can we grow in the supernatural life, how can we keep an element of spirituality in our lives when we are so eternally busy, as a result of obedience, with school work, or hospital work, or caring for children or old people? Sometimes, at the end of a day, we may say to ourselves, "What has all this to do with perfection and holiness and salvation? What did I do today? After school I held a play rehearsal, and I prepared blankets for summer storage. I had to look for a new sewing machine. I wasted two hours listening to agents and salesmen. I had to supervise the children's dance. I had to decorate the hall for an assembly. I had to clean out the storage room. What kind of spiritual life is that? How can I become holier when the greater part of my time is spent at such things?"

If we ever find ourselves thinking such thoughts, we may recall that we came to the community to serve God and grow in holiness; and, therefore, we have a right to expect the community to guide us in our search for holiness. Yet, if we look into our rules and constitutions, nowhere will we find a paragraph reading like this: "From five-thirty to seven-thirty each morning, the Religious will devote themselves to formal prayer, Mass, and the growing in holiness. During the remaining hours of the day, they will devote themselves to such works as will contribute to their support and the well-being of the other members of the community and the furthering of the community works." No, our holy founders were wise. They intended that all the actions of our community life would glorify God and lead to growth in holiness. They intended that in everything we do, we imitate Christ and, thereby, sanctify ourselves. And for the most part, what we do is prosaic, ordinary, and unheroic. The majority of our acts are not specifically acts of religion.

The same pattern of life was likewise true of Christ, yet, every action of His whole life glorified God. Of Him it was written, "He has

done all things well" (Mark 7:37). He did well, not only the remarkable things, like His miracles and the preaching in His public life, but also the ordinary things of His daily life. And they were, by far, the more numerous. For thirty years of His hidden life, all of His actions were what we would call ordinary actions. As a little boy, He ran errands for His mother and foster-father. He studied His lessons, helped His mother with the dishes, played with the other children in the village. As a young man, He took over the carpenter business of St. Joseph; He made tables and chairs for the neighbors in the village; He made a crib for the young married couple down the street; He repaired their tools and implements; He went visiting with His mother and was company for her on long summer evenings. When He began His public life, people were amazed and incredulous at what they heard of Him. Was not this the son of Mary and Joseph? They had seen Him as a young carpenter about their town. It was impossible that there could be anything extraordinary about Him.

The same was true of the Blessed Virgin Mary. She did not spend her life draped in a silken dress, kneeling on a satin-covered *prie dieu* in prayer as we see her represented so often in holy pictures. She was a young Jewish housewife, and her fingers knew the rhythm of a darning needle, her hands the flabby feel of bread dough and the swirl of warm water in the washtub. She prayed, but she also patched; for she had a little boy to care for and to feed and dress and put to bed at night with a kiss. She swept and washed and cooked the meals, but every one of these ordinary actions made her grow in holiness. Why? Because it was done for her son, and He was God. And there is the secret of growing in holiness. If we do what we do for God, we grow in holiness, whether it be teaching, sweeping, mending clothes, cooking meals, or running a college. We call these ordinary actions. Maybe we mean by that natural actions. But truly there is no such thing as a natural action, or, for that matter, an ordinary action when it is done by a person in the state of grace, and living in the supernatural life. For once we are a true Christian,

everything that we do, which is not sinful, is supernatural, and nothing supernatural can ever be called ordinary.

Not only does everything we do for God become supernatural and, therefore, increase our holiness, but it also glorifies God. We have seen that we live the supernatural life by baptism. What Christ is by nature, we are by adoption. We are adopted sons of God, living with His life. Now, the aim of Christ was to give glory to God. "I do not seek my own glory," He said (John 8:50). His aim was also to get others to give glory to God. "So let your light shine before men, in order that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). Again, He said, "I do always the things that are pleasing to him" (John 8:29). That was His whole life—to give glory to God, and He accomplished it in everything that He did, in both ordinary and extraordinary acts. Consequently, if we are to imitate Him, our aim must be to glorify and to please God by doing His will. We should live for that reason only—to give glory to God. And we do that by being obedient to His will which is made known to us by the commands of our Superiors, however prosaic or laborious they may be. That these commands of duty are most certainly His will for us assures us that, in obeying them, we are glorifying Him and growing in sanctity. On the other hand, in doing something other than what we ought to do at any particular moment, we neither glorify Him, nor grow in holiness, even if, by thus neglecting our duty, we could be in prayer and ecstasy in the chapel.

In this matter of doing God's will, we might list four classes of people in the world. First, there are those who do everything of their own will, and not of God's will. Of course, these people are bad. They are in mortal sin. Then, there are those who do only as much of God's will as they must to avoid mortal sin. For the rest, they do their own will. They are only essentially good; but at least, they stay out of grave sin. Then, there are those who do more of God's will than is needed merely to avoid mortal sin. They add mortification and the practice of some virtues. They are better than the essentially good. They are integrally good. And finally, there are those who do

all of God's will and none of their own will. They are the best of Christians—the only ones who are truly aiming for perfection. They try to understand and imitate the perfection of Christ who said, negatively, "I have come down from heaven not to do my own will" (John 6:38), and positively, "I do always the things that are pleasing to Him" (John 8:29). Note the "always." There are no office hours for charity, no office hours for love of God.

In seeking perfection, it is not only important that we do God's will, as Christ did, but we should also imitate His specific motives in doing what He did. Christ holds before us His own beautiful motives very clearly. "I do always the things that are pleasing to Him" (John 8:29). His aim was to be pleasing to His Father. So, it is to please God, Our Father, that we, too, should constantly act. We should do this in union with and in imitation of Christ as a child of God. We are children of God and brothers of Christ from baptism, and imitation of Christ means living our baptism, living as God's children, living in union with Christ, our brother. As St. Paul said, "It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). We live in Him and He lives in us. We live with His life. We are literally in union with God in Christ. That is what St. Paul meant when he said, "Your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3). Our union with God is in Christ in baptism. From this it follows that the only time we are really functionally Christians is when we act as Christ did, from that same motive, to please God, Our Father.

It is much more than purity of intention. We do what we do to please God *through* Christ, *per Jesum*. St. Paul says, "Whether you eat or drink, or do anything else, do all for the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). But then he also gives us further refinement of this motive. He says, "Whatever you do in word or in work, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Col. 3:17). Again, he says, "Giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father" (Eph. 5:20). It was this that made St. Paul such a consummate Christian. It was this union with Christ which he constantly stressed. In union with Christ we are

joined to God, Our Father.

Here lies the glory of our lives as Christians, If we do all that we do to please God, Our Father, we give Him more and more glory, we become holier and holier, and we earn a higher place in heaven. Furthermore, by acting thus, we bring joy, not only to God and Christ, but to the angels and saints and all of heaven. If there is "'joy in heaven over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:7), it certainly does not mean that the angels are joyful only when a sinner does penance. Any time that what we have to do is done to please God, Our Father, it also pleases the angels and saints.

The practical consequences of all this are obvious. If we aim to act, as we do, to please God, Our Father, through Christ, we will be eager to do what He wants, when He wants us to do it, and in the best way we can. What does He want us to do? It is to Christ that we must turn for an answer. At the Last Supper on the night before He died, He said in His prayer to His Father, "I have glorified thee on earth. I have accomplished the work that thou hast given me to do" (John 17:4). That was all that mattered. The work He was given to do, He had done. This same note of finality He reiterated the following afternoon hanging from His gibbet. At the very last moment of His mortal life, He cried out in a voice of triumph, "It is consummated!" (John 19:30). It is this that He wants to hear each of us say at the end of our day, at the end of our week, at the end of our life. He wants us to be able to say, "It is finished! The work thou hast given us to do, we have done." That is how He wants us to glorify Him.

It matters not what work He has given us to do. As long as we do what He wants, as best we can, when He wants it, and to please Him through Christ, we serve to glorify Him. When we wash dishes and sweep floors, and mend clothes, and tend and teach the children, and care for the sick, receive bill payments, talk to salesmen and direct workmen, we glorify Him just as surely as do the angels up in heaven when they veil their faces with their wings and chant, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts." For this is what God wants

us to do, just as much as He wants the angels eternally to be praising Him in heaven. We know that whatever is included in our duty or in the orders of the Superior is God's will, just as surely as if He were suddenly to appear in person and ask us to do it.

Now, all this we have read before. No doubt it is familiar, and we agree that it is truly wonderful in theory. If we are sincere, we want to have such an ideal in life—to work only to please God and thereby glorify Him and earn a higher place in heaven. No doubt we are all struggling hard to do just this; but at times we do get discouraged and wonder about our success. Such wonder is needless, for we can tell almost infallibly whether we are doing what we do to please God by our attitude toward the commands of our Superior and the demands of our day-by-day duties. All we have to do is to ask ourselves this question, "Do I do cheerfully everything that God wants, when He wants it, in the best way I can?" Certainly, if we are living on the first floor of sensuality, we will not have such an attitude as this toward the imitation of the obedience of Christ, for we will be living by our feelings which must inevitably suffer. If we are living on the second floor of reason, it will be impossible to have a truly Christian attitude toward obedience to our Superiors and to the duties of our state in life, for comparison with others' duties will always beset us. We must be living on the third floor of faith. We must see these things eye to eye with God, if we are to do cheerfully everything that He asks.

Admittedly, it is a large order to look habitually in this way upon the orders of Superiors and upon our daily duties. It is an order that is impossible of fulfillment by a human being with his unaided human nature. It is a supernatural goal. Therefore, it requires supernatural aid and supernatural means, prayer, and prayer particularly during temptation.

Here, then, is proposed the first of the keys promised in this book, the key to the third floor of imitation of Christ in His obedience to the duties of His state in life, the key to doing all things to please God through Christ. The key is this: when Superiors ask or

duty demands something of us that we do not like, instead of giving in to the temptation to complain, even interiorly, say this little prayer, "Thanks, God!" There is the key! The saying of the prayer, “Thanks, God!" is an act of our will, showing that we want what He wants and we thank Him for asking it of us. Only then, when we have thanked God for what we do not like, can we be sure that our motive in doing what we do is solely to please Him. There is absolutely no chance of our self-will being involved in something that we do not like, something against which our feelings rebel. There is no chance for mixed motives. It is our will to do it simply because it is His will for us.

Sometimes we say that we do things to please God; but do we, really? There are so many things that might vitiate our motives. We might like the work that we are asked to do, or the Superior who asks us to do it, or the way we are asked, or the reward that we will get when we have done it. It may be work that is pleasing to us, with a certain satisfaction in the doing of it. It may be that the Superior is an exceptional person. We like him because he is a friend of ours, or we like her because she is always so gracious in asking help, that it is a pleasure to do things for her. She is always ready with a word of praise, or he always commends us when we have finished. In all these instances, it is difficult to separate personal satisfaction from the supernatural motive of pleasing God.

But the real test of whether or not we are working for God comes when we do not like the work we are given to do. If we work in a hospital and must do unpleasant things, like caring for cases of loathsome disease, doing distasteful cleaning, dealing with patients who are not patient, can we say, “Thanks, God!” as we do these things? If we are in a school or parish, and are given charge of the sodality, when we know nothing about it, or we are told to take charge of the altar boys or direct the choir, and it is the last thing in the world we want to do, can we honestly say, “Thanks, God!”?

Again, the test comes when we do not naturally like the Superior. She has a sinus condition, or he has a headache that makes him

irritable, or, perhaps, we are irritable, ourselves, and there is a certain sub-surface antipathy between us. Can we sincerely say, "Thanks, God!" when they ask us to do some chore?

Once more, the test comes when we do not like the way we are told to do a thing. The Superior doesn't ask us graciously, but tells us peremptorily, "Do this!" Can we say, "Thanks, God!"? Sometimes, as far as reward is concerned, we know that when we have done our best we will not only get no reward, but we will be reprimanded; and we know this in advance. Can we thank God in all of these situations? For each one of these things, can we say, "Deo gratias!"? If we can, then we know we are working to please God, alone. We cannot be deceived, for in these things there can be no natural delight of pleasing ourselves. We can be working only to please Him.

So, it may be said that one of the best ways to develop the habit of imitating the obedience of Christ and doing whatever we do to please God is to specialize on unkind or thoughtless Superiors and unpleasant tasks. Otherwise, there is danger of saying to ourselves that we are doing this task for God, when we are not. We mean it potentially. We wish we shall and we hope we will. It is an act of desire, or, as the philosophers say, a velleity. We hope we will do what we do for God during the day, but human nature being what it is, perhaps we will not. We say to ourselves, "Now that I have made that morning offering, everything that I do today is for God." But is it? Nine out of ten times it is not. If it is, what reason should we have for complaining, for being upset at what we have to do, for being dissatisfied? If we are working for God, then we should be happy to do whatever He gives us to do. But we cannot be sure that everything we do is solely to please God until time after time, day after day, we have developed the habit of thanking God for what we do not like.

Now, if this has not been our practice, we can expect that the first time we try to say, "Thanks, God!" for something that we do not like, we may choke on it. We will not feel like saying it. But let us say it anyway. Remember, this is not a question of feeling. We must al-

ways distinguish between our feelings and our will. Our will is what counts in the spiritual life. It is with our will that we love God, not with our feelings. Perhaps the last thing in the world we may feel like doing is saying, "Thanks, God!" if we are asked to do something that we do not like. But because we do not feel like doing it, it does not mean that we cannot will it in spite of our feelings. Our feelings cannot counteract our will. It might happen that some Sunday morning you would not feel like going to Mass. But if, in spite of your feelings, you do go to Mass, would you say that your assistance at Mass was not valid and that you did not fulfill your obligation because of your feelings? Not at all. It is the will that counts, and not the feelings.

A priest was speaking of this at one time to a Sister and she said, at length, "Father, I couldn't say, 'Thanks, God!' I'd feel a hypocrite. How can I thank God when I don't mean it, when my whole being rebels at a command or at what I must do. How can I do it?" He replied, "Well, you can, if you want, say, 'Thanks, God!,' can't you? You can say it in spite of your feelings?" She averred that she could. Then the priest said, "Well, that is your will. If you did not will to say it, you couldn't say it." Her reply was, "Oh, you mean that no matter how I feel, if I say it, I will it?" She then proceeded to tell him what he had been trying to tell her for half an hour. St. Francis de Sales, speaking on this point of acting contrary to one's feelings, says, "Do not say that you repeat acts of confidence indeed, but only with your lips; for if the heart did not will it, the lips could not utter a word."

So important is this question of feeling in the spiritual life, that it might be profitable at this point to digress somewhat and discuss it more fully. Much of what follows in this book cannot be understood or practiced unless we have clear ideas on the nature of our feelings. This is a matter which causes considerable difficulty with some Religious, perhaps even to a greater extent with women than with men. Such a situation is understandable in view of the nature with which God has endowed women. They are creatures of delicate

feelings and refined sensibilities, and they tend to live according to these feelings to a greater degree than do men. They are, by nature, inclined to judge according to their likes and dislikes. Their first impression, good or bad, may often influence their later judgment of a person. This is true because God has given them this kind of psychological constitution. So, a woman will find it impossible to remove feelings from her life in the same way as she discards a pair of gloves.

However, if she, or any Religious, is to achieve peace of mind in the spiritual life, she necessarily must understand that her feelings or emotions are not always under her complete control. Hence there is neither moral guilt nor spiritual merit in the mere experiencing of them. If they are the right kind of feelings, virtuous and holy, they are a useful and comforting adjunct to her love of God. But they are not a measure or criterion of that love. On the other hand, if they are the wrong kind of feelings, unholy or uncharitable, they in no way hinder her love of God, nor do they vitiate it, providing she does not give in to the feelings, providing she acts contrary to their promptings. Love of God lies in the will, and it is within our power to act contrary to our feelings. The test of our love is not what we feel, but what we do.

To act contrary to feelings which are opposed to virtue is much more pleasing to God and much more meritorious than to act in accord with our own pleasant or virtuous feelings. Let us try to make this clear by an example. Suppose, at the beginning of some particular period of recreation, Brother A asks Brother B to play a game of Chinese checkers. It so happens that Brother B is delighted, because at that time he feels very much like playing the game. Furthermore, it also gives him an opportunity to perform an act of charity. And so he does. But, then suppose another occasion with the same circumstances, except that this time Brother B feels like doing anything in the world but playing Chinese checkers. He has been correcting papers all afternoon and is not yet able to focus his eyes properly. He dreads the thought of looking at all those colored marbles. But, in

spite of his feelings, he agreeably acquiesces to Brother A's request and plays the game with him. It is easy to see which of those situations showed the greater love for the neighbor, which instance contained the greater charity. The latter, for in that case there was not only no personal satisfaction involved, but there were actually strong contrary feelings. Yet, the Brother did not act according to his feelings. He overcame them by the sheer force of his will, motivated by faith. So, too, in the practice of any virtue, or in our love of God, it is not the feelings we have that count, but what we do in spite of them. To act contrary to our feelings when they are unvirtuous is something most pleasing to God.

Our feelings, at any given moment, are the inclinations of our sensitive nature as we find them proceeding from temperament, taste, disposition, health, or even, perhaps, a past habit of sin. They often cannot be helped at the moment; but some of the greatest triumphs of grace consist in the will choosing in direct opposition to what the feelings wish. We cannot help feeling, at times, like not saying our prayers, or not getting up in the morning, or not being gracious to our companions. But our will, with a proper motive, can determine to act contrary to our feelings. Our love of God is thereby manifested to a greater degree than if we acted only because we "felt like it." Furthermore, it makes no difference how persistent our unholy feelings are. No matter how strong they are, no matter how long they remain with us, as long as we act contrary to them, we are performing acts that are very pleasing to God and most meritorious.

It might appear to some that to act contrary to one's feelings in such a way would be hypocrisy, not sincerity. For example, they feel that they cannot express delight at seeing a fellow Religious who is annoying to them, because they do not naturally feel glad about it. Expressing joy, to their mind, would be insincere. This, of course, represents one of the most subtle temptations of the devil. He likes to make us think that it is dishonest to act outwardly in a way that belies us interiorly. He tells us that we are not being ourselves. But this is not so.

There are in each of us two selves, one the true self, the other a false self. We are, perhaps, more conscious of the false self than we are of the true, and that is why the false sometimes seems to be the real self. Because of the sin of Adam, we discover within ourselves a conflict between our higher and lower faculties, between our reason and will, on the one hand, and our passions or sense appetites and feelings on the other. This conflict is one of the penalties visited upon human nature as a result of original sin.

But, through Baptism, we were given the potentialities to reestablish the balance that should exist between our lower and higher natures. We were born again of water and the Spirit, and the true self in us is this new man, this child of the Spirit. In being thus renewed, we received the infused virtues of faith, hope, and charity, which gave us the power and the equipment necessary to dominate our feelings and lower appetites with our supernaturalized intellect and will. But our false or lower self still battles against our true self. We must constantly exercise the powers of the spirit we received at Baptism, if we are to win the struggle against the flesh, our false self. As St. Paul said to the Galatians, "The flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, so that you do not what you would. If we live by the Spirit, by the Spirit let us also walk" (Gal. 5:17,25). Again, he said to the Ephesians and to us, "Put on the new man which has been created according to God in justice and holiness of truth" (Eph. 4:24).

So, the truth of the matter is that we actually betray ourselves when we act and speak according to the unspiritual, false self that is in us. We are really acting hypocritically when we follow the inclinations of our feelings and lower appetites as if they were our true self, when in reality they are false; for we are children of the Spirit. We are true to ourselves, we walk in the Spirit, we put on the new man, when we act according to the promptings of our supernaturalized mind and will, even though we "feel" anything but that interiorly. We should do our best to ignore our feelings, just as passers-by ignore dogs that they hear barking in the distance. The arguments of

Satan condemning as hypocrisy our efforts to act spiritually in spite of our feelings, must be treated as grave temptations and combated valiantly.

Delightful corroboration of what we have said is in one of the conferences of Saint Francis de Sales. He was speaking to Sisters on the question of aversions, and had this to say: "Even the caresses and signs of friendship which we bestow against our inclination upon people for whom we have an aversion, are better and more pleasing to God than those which are drawn from us by sensible affection. And they ought not to be regarded as proceeding from duplicity or simulation, for though I may have a feeling contrary to what I seem to express, it is only in my lower nature, and the acts which I perform are done by force of reason, which is the highest part of my soul. So that, even if those whom I caress were to know that I did so because I have an aversion for them, they ought not to be offended, but rather value and cherish it more than if it were given from sensible affection; for aversions are natural and not in themselves bad, so long as we do not follow them. On the contrary, they are a means of practicing a thousand different virtues, and Our Lord, Himself, is better pleased with us when we draw near to kiss His feet with extreme reluctance than when we approach Him with great sweetness" (*The Spiritual Conferences*, p. 132).

If we need more demonstration of the fact that feelings do not count, we have but to turn to the prostrate form of Our Savior in the Garden of Gethsemane. He certainly did not feel like going through His passion and death which lay ahead of Him on the morrow. His whole being shuddered at the thought, so much so that He sweat drops of blood. He even prayed that He would not have to go through with it. "Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass away from me." Yes, in spite of His feelings, He prayed, "Yet not as I will but as thou willest" (Matt. 26:39). He willed what His Father willed, even though His feelings so strongly resisted.

To return to our original point of thanking God for what we do not like, the next time we find ourselves face to face with a disagree-

able task or command, we should say, "Thanks, God!" even if we do not feel like saying it. We must act according to our true self and oppose the feelings of our false self. The strange part of the whole process is that, if we develop the habit of saying, "Thanks, God!" for unpleasant things, after a time God will work such transformation in our hearts that we will actually feel like saying it. Our spirit will begin to triumph almost completely over our feelings. This is true all throughout the spiritual life. God does things for us that we could never do for ourselves. All He asks is that we make our own little feeble efforts, and He will do the rest. It is like a mother teaching her little child to walk. She watches it toddle a few steps and then tumble in a heap. She urges it on to try anew, again and again, until, her sympathy overflowing at the feeble efforts, with one loving motion she sweeps the child into her arms and carries it to its destination. And so God acts with us. All He asks is that we toddle our few steps, that we make the attempt, and He will do the rest. If we develop the habit of saying, "Thanks, God!" in the situations, such as we have been describing, He will so change our hearts that nothing we are asked to do, or that is in our duty to do, will ever really bother us again. We will then know from experience the reward of the fourth Beatitude. We will have our fill on this earth of the peace that surpasses understanding which Christ promised to give to those who harken to His words, "I have given you an example, that as I have done...so you also should do" (John 13:15).

But we must make up our minds that we will not acquire this habit overnight. No habit is developed that quickly. It requires constant repetition and practice. A person does not learn to play the piano by deciding to practice for an hour one day, and having done that, then think himself an accomplished musician. He must work at it day after day for a long time. Only then can he play the piano well. So, too, we cannot acquire this habit of saying, "Thanks, God!" merely by a resolution that we *are* going to live on the third floor of faith and do what we do to please God alone. This will come about only from repetition and practice.

Therefore, day after day, we must resolve to thank God for the first thing we do that day that we do not like. The more particular the resolution the more effective will it be. A general resolution such as: "From now on, I am going to thank God for what I don't like," will be fruitless and of little effect. We must present our will with a particular challenge, particular, if possible, as to time, and person, and place. For example, today is Saturday. On Saturday, I always have to do such and such a duty which I dislike intensely, and which always upsets me. Today, then, at ten o'clock, just before I start that duty, I am going to say, "Thanks, God!" I will try to repeat this as often as I think of it during the course of the job. Or again, today, in the Superior's office, when he asks me to do something and I feel resentment welling up in me at what he asks, or the way he asks it, I will say, "Thanks, God!"

It is well to note that in this matter of resolutions, it helps and is a great psychological challenge to ourselves if we write out our resolution each morning on a slip of paper or in a little book. This writing of the resolution impresses it on our mind and serves as a reminder when the anticipated situation arises. However, a Religious should not write that resolution while in chapel, but, rather, wait until there is a moment after Mass or breakfast, wherever it can be done privately.

At the time of examen, we should look back over the day to see whether we have fulfilled the resolutions we made. The particular examen should go hand in hand with the making of resolutions in the process of eradicating faults and acquiring virtues. It cannot be overlooked. Unfortunately, it is an exercise which is often neglected or poorly done. Contributing factors to this are a lack of specific aims and resolutions which are too broad and vague and general. It will be found that the making of precise resolutions will greatly facilitate this exercise.

To illustrate how the examen can become most profitable and effective, if the resolutions are properly particularized, let us suppose that we are concentrating our efforts on the acquiring of the

virtue of obedience. Our failing, we have discovered, is a certain tendency to complain, either exteriorly or interiorly, about what we are asked to do. We realize that when we do this, we show that we are not, in those instances at least, doing what we do so as to please God. And so we sincerely wish to eradicate this fault and acquire the opposite virtue. Further, we have, from self-examination, foreseen the circumstances in which we might fail, and have made our resolution, specifying, if possible, the persons, and time, and place involved.

When, at noon or in the evening, the bell announces the time for the examen, we should recollect ourselves as we start for the chapel. Once there, it is a simple and brief matter to go over in our mind's eye the span of the morning or afternoon. Because our resolution was particularized, we know immediately where to look. And so, placing ourselves in the circumstances of our resolution again, we ask ourselves: "When Superior asked me to do such a thing in the office this morning, did I say, 'Thanks, God!'?" Or, "When I was tempted to complain and feel sorry for myself about the amount of work I had to do, did I think of my resolution and say, 'Thanks, God!'?" Or, again, "Did I say, 'Thanks, God!' as I resolved to do when I looked for the first time at the appointment list for weekly duties?" And so on.

Whatever our resolution was, we can look immediately to it instead of trying to make a complete and minute examination of all we have done over the space of a morning or afternoon. In this way we do not scatter our efforts, but concentrate on the most vulnerable spot in our spiritual armor. We thereby strengthen and build up this weak point more rapidly than we would if we dissipated our energies by trying to attack too many faults at once. *The Imitation of Christ* informs us that, if we rid ourselves of one fault a year, we will soon be saints.

The particular examen, then, will discover to us in a brief moment whether we have fulfilled our resolution. Maybe we succeeded; maybe we did not. If we did, we should thank God for His help. If we

did not, without discouragement we should tell Him we are sorry. In either case, for the following morning or afternoon, we should take the same resolution, trying to foresee the situation in which we might fail in as much detail as possible, the time, person, place, and things involved. We resolve that once or twice on those occasions when we must do something that we do not like, we will say, "Thanks, God!" Day after day we make that resolution, then examine ourselves, gradually increasing the number of daily instances. Only in this way shall we acquire the habit that will enable us spontaneously to say, "Thanks, God!" in every situation involving obedience in our duties when we do not like them or do not feel like doing them. This is the only way we can be sure that we have an active will to please God in what we do. We may have an active will to do this, but unless we express it, we are not sure. We can say, "Thanks, God!" no matter how we feel about it. When we do it without feeling like it, that is our will showing its love in a very real manner. Of course, there is no need to elaborate that if we do cheerfully what we have to do to please God, when those things are unpleasant, we can be sure that we will do the pleasant things, also, for that reason and in that way.

So, we have seen the first key to the supernatural house on the third floor. It is habitually to say, "Thanks, God!" for what we do not like. Living on the third floor, we will be solicitous about imitating Christ in His obedience to the duties of His state in life. That means that day by day, hour by hour, we do what God wants, when He wants it, in the best way we can, without discouragement if we fail, but cheerfully picking ourselves up again and trying once more. We know what God wants for us specifically from the rules, the order of day, the commands of our Superiors, and the obligations of the particular duty assigned to us. But acting in this way is purely supernatural, and is, therefore, something beyond our powers as mere human beings. Since original sin, our tendency has been to do just the opposite. There is a spiritual law of gravity pulling us downward. Hence, there is need of supernatural help, namely prayer, and

prayer especially during temptation. So, when we are tempted to rebel interiorly or exteriorly at anything concerning our Superior, or the duties that we are called upon to perform, here is the little key to the third floor of faith. We say this little prayer, "Thanks, God!"

When we have so developed the habit of saying, "Thanks, God!" that it comes to our lips spontaneously and automatically in any and every disagreeable situation, we will truly be imitating Christ in His obedience, and we will be living a sincerely supernatural life in this regard. As a result, we will be truly happy, happier than we have been before in our religious life. For we will then want what God wants. It will be impossible then for us to be unhappy.

4. Love of the Poor

When Our Divine Lord was on earth, He went about doing good to all people, but showing an especial love for the poor. They were His favorites. Thus, a glance at the outline at the end of Chapter 2 will reveal that next to be considered in our imitation of Christ is His love of the poor. This lies so close to the Sacred Heart of Our Lord. Once during Our Lord's public life, the disciples of St. John the Baptist came to Christ to ask if He were the Messiah who was to come, or should they look for another. In answer, Our Lord resorted to an oriental circumlocution. He did not tell them outright that He was the expected Messiah and that they could end their long wait and search. Instead, He replied to them: "Go and report to John what you have heard and seen: the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise, the poor have the gospel preached to them" (Luke 7:22). It was this last phrase that was so characteristic of Christ. Other prophets had performed miracles. But Christ was aware that John's disciples knew that it was to be a special mark of the coming Messiah that he would love the poor. Many centuries before, the prophet Isaias had said of him, "The Lord...will have mercy on his poor ones" (Isaias 49:13). This prophecy Our Divine Savior fulfilled in every way.

He had chosen to live His boyhood and young manhood among the poor in one of the poorest places in Galilee—Nazareth. This was a despised town whose reputation in the minds of the people can be had from the contemptuous remark passed one day about Christ,

"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). On the first return of Our Lord to Nazareth after He began His public life, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, as was His custom, and stood to read the Scriptures. He opened the volume to the Prophet Isaias and read: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; because He has anointed me; to bring good news to the poor he has sent me, to proclaim to the captives release, and sight to the blind." Then, He said, "Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing…" (Luke 4:18-21). Always He was associated with the poor; always it was for the poor that He showed the greatest solicitude.

It is this same love of the poor that He asks of His followers in imitation of Him. As St. John has said, "God is love" (1 John 4:8). He has shown forth His love by giving us His Son, Christ. In beholding Christ, we behold the charity of God. So we, too, should show forth the charity of God as imitators of Christ. God should be able to look upon us as He did upon Christ and say, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). He *can* do this if we have Christ's love for the poor. He *can* call us His "beloved son," if we practice the counsel which Christ gave us in His fifth Beatitude.

When Our Savior gave His rules for happiness, the Beatitudes, the fourth Beatitude referred to our duty to our neighbor and to God, the giving to each his due in justice. But the fifth Beatitude advances us a step further along the road to perfect imitation of Christ. It goes beyond justice, beyond the call of duty, and speaks of spontaneous favors. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (Matt. 5:7). According to this Beatitude, we should cheerfully and readily give, not only to friends and those close to us who have a special claim on us, but to whoever needs our help. For that is the nature of mercy—to help those who need it, whoever they may be.

St. Thomas Aquinas in treating this Beatitude says that there are many who will not be merciful, that is, they will not be concerned with the needs of others lest they be burdened with others' miseries as well as their own. So to those who will be merciful, God promises mercy. To those who will concern themselves with the

miseries and needs of others, God will show mercy. In other words, God will relieve the merciful of their own miseries.

In addition to teaching us the Beatitude, Our Lord inculcated the same lesson of love of the poor by example, story, and direct counsel. One day, one of the rulers of the Jews, a Pharisee, invited Him to dinner, hoping to catch Him in some error. It was the Sabbath, and Christ, after placing the Pharisees in an unanswerable dilemma about the lawfulness of healing on the Sabbath, proceeded to cure a fellow guest who was afflicted with the dropsy. Then He turned and spoke to the assembled guests of humility in taking of the lowest place at table. Finally, turning to His insincere host and directing His remarks to him alone, He said, "When thou givest a dinner or a supper, do not invite thy friends, or thy brethren, or thy relatives, or thy rich neighbors, lest perhaps they also invite thee in return, and a recompense be made to thee. But when thou givest a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; and blessed shalt thou be, because they have nothing to repay thee with; for thou shalt be repaid at the resurrection of the just" (Luke 14:12-14).

He reiterated this promise of eternal reward for love of the poor at the time He spoke of the last judgment. When all the nations of the earth are gathered together before the Son of Man to be judged, He will separate them one from the other on His right and left hands. "Then the king will say to those on his right hand, 'Come, blessed of my Father, take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; naked and you covered me; sick and you visited me; I was in prison and you came to me…Amen I say to you, as long as you did it for one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it for me'" (Matt. 25:34-40). In other words, our final judgment is to be made on the basis of our attitude and conduct toward the poor. And in these beautiful remarks of our Savior, He catalogued all the various classes of the poor. There are the spiritually and mentally poor represented by those in prison, for a person is generally in prison

because of moral aberrations. Frequently, though not always, these departures from moral standards are caused by, or have their roots in, mental deficiencies. Then, there are the physically poor—the sick; the socially poor—the stranger who was given shelter; and, finally, the financially poor—the naked and hungry and thirsty.

Now, since love of the poor was to be such a characteristic mark of a follower of Christ, and, according to God's plan, it is such an important part of our living the supernatural life and of our eternal happiness, it would be salutary to consider briefly our own habitual attitude toward these various kinds of poor.

First, let us consider the financially poor. For many obvious reasons, Sisters are not exposed to that test of their attitude toward the financially poor which almost constantly besets the Roman-collared priest in a large city like New York. Almost every time he ventures onto the street, he is collared in more than one sense by vagrants in varying degrees of sobriety. Their appeals seem limited to two categories. They want money for a cup of coffee ("Honest, Father!"), or they want carfare to Jersey City. Just why they all seem to want to go to Jersey City has never been quite clear. It must be peculiarly worth a visit. Be that as it may, such appeals little concern our Sisters.

But there are other aspects of the financially poor which do concern them, as well as all Religious. For example, is there any difference in our attitude in visiting or caring for the poor patient in the corner bed in the hospital ward from the way we treat the wife of the wealthy business man, or the rich politician in the suite, the man who always leaves a lavish gift to the hospital when he leaves? Are we as kind and considerate of the child who comes to school unwashed, in ragged clothes, as we are of the child whose father has a car in which he takes the Brothers or Sisters riding occasionally? What is our standard of judging and evaluating people? Do we regard as the "best" people those who have the most money, the finest homes, and the greatest degree of material success? If our own relatives are not too successful materially, are we ashamed of them

when they come to visit us, and do we try to keep them out of the way if they do not make as attractive an appearance as the relatives of the other Religious? Saint Vincent de Paul used to make it a point to tell people that he was the son of a swineherd, and that he, himself, had tended the swine during his youth. Are we as solicitous about going out of our way to do favors for poor people who cannot repay us in kind as we are for others from whom we may expect return? Is it purely their need that motivates our actions, or the satisfaction, appreciation, and gratitude that we know we will receive.

It would be well for us to recall the words of the Epistle of St. James: "My brethren, do not join faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ to partiality toward persons. For if a man in fine apparel, having a gold ring, enters your assembly, and a poor man in mean attire enters also, and you pay attention to him who is clothed in fine apparel and say, 'Sit thou here in this good place'; but you say to the poor man, 'Stand thou here,' or 'Sit by my footstool'; are you not making distinctions among yourselves, and do you not become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brethren! Has not God chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which God has promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man...If, however, you fulfill the royal law, according to the scriptures, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,' you do well. But if you show partiality toward persons, you commit sin, being convicted of the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law, but offends in one point, has become guilty of all...So speak and so act as men about to be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to him who has not shown mercy; but mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:1-13). It was this teaching that was so well exemplified in the life of Saint Vincent de Paul. His favorite maxim was, "Love the poor and fear not death." Whenever he encountered a soul who was fearful of dying, he always recommended charity to the poor as a means of allaying such fears.

Let us consider now our attitude toward the socially poor. By the socially poor we mean those people who were born into unpopu-

lar races or nationalities, the people who are friendless and despised, those who do not belong to the "in" group for some reason. Even within the confines of a religious community, it is unfortunately not unheard of that there should be feelings and antipathies of race or nationality. Certain people are looked down upon.

Here, also, we are concerned with what are known as cliques, the bane of any religious house or community. These cliques are closed corporations of a few individuals united by some good or evil bond. They present a solid front which no one else can penetrate. The same Religious are always together. If you see one, you see them all. They manage to get together at recreations, at lulls in work, in walks in the garden. Now, we know that it is legitimate and reasonable to have friends, and even friends whom we like more than others. This gift of human friendship is one of the greatest that God has given to man. But to be friends to such an extent that no one else is welcome to join our group, to take part in our conversations, to be interested in our interests, or to enjoy our company, is distinctly un-Christian and by the same token, un-supernatural. St. Paul says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor freeman; there is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). So whatever we do in the way of "brushing off" or making unwelcome one of these least brethren of Christ, we do, sadly, to Him.

Now let us consider our attitude toward the physically poor, those lacking health, beauty, and a sound body. Do we have the same attitude toward the grouchy, complaining patient that we do toward the sweet patient who never puts a finger to her bell? If we work in a clinic or out-patient department, where our work is almost exclusively with the poor, are we curt and brusque with them, figuratively pushing them around almost as if they were something less than human and not made to the image of God? Do we greet them with a smile as we would a priest, if he were to walk into the clinic? If there is a difference in our manner, is it because we might expect appreciation and gratitude and understanding from the priest, and

not from the poor? The poor, it seems, are frequently uncouth, stubborn, and unappreciative. We do not "feel like" being kind to them. Yet, they are suffering members of Christ just as much as the cultured and the wealthy. The motion picture, *Monsieur Vincent*, showed conditions in the hospitals in Paris in his time, conditions far worse than anything that might be imagined today. Yet, many of his Daughters of Charity became saintly by taking cheerfully the ingratitude and taunts of the smelly, uncouth patients of those primitive hospitals.

If our duty is other than nursing, but still in a hospital, are we solicitous about visiting the sick? Even though our time is limited, might we not do more? A complaint made once by a patient discharged from a Catholic hospital was that "The only time I ever saw a Sister was when I came to the office to pay the bill." Might that accusation be true because of negligence on our part? Sometimes it is difficult for us, as Religious, to realize just how much even a momentary visit from a Sister, or a Brother, or a priest means to a patient, especially when a remembrance in prayer is promised. "Be not slow to visit the sick," says the Holy Spirit, "for by these things thou shalt be confirmed in love" (Eccl. 7:39).

It is true that, with the growth of modern hospitals, much more organization and scientific method are necessary than was the case in past generations. But some of us may wonder if the pendulum has not swung so far in this direction that some Catholic hospitals seem to have discarded the New Testament as a handbook, and substituted a sociology book. Be that as it may, if all the cold organization and regimentation are truly necessary, it means that we must strive extra hard for personal service, if we are to imitate Christ in His love for the poor. If we must receive and discharge patients from behind impersonal enclosures, then it seems that we might, at least, step out from behind the enclosures at some moment in the process to make them feel welcome or to say, "Godspeed!" Christ promised to reward even a cup of cold water given in His Name. But, let it be noted, it was the water that was to be cold, and not the giver. After

all, this is not an ordinary hospital that we are running. It is a *Catholic* hospital. People still in the world can run a hospital and do a very good job of it. If all the Religious in the world were suddenly martyred tomorrow, hospitals would still be run by lay people, and the sick would still be cared for. The only justification for Religious devoting their religious lives to hospital work is that they can bring more of Christ and His love to the care of the sick than lay people would. If we do not do that, we are losing sight of our true objectives.

But with modern organization, much of the Christ-like heart seems to have disappeared from some Catholic hospitals. This is shown sometimes in the approach to the problem of collecting monies for services given. Whether the adamant, untrusting, "big business" attitude of some hospitals toward money is the reflection of the administration or merely of the individual Religious in charge makes little difference to the patient. They sometimes depart from a first meeting with Religious, sadly disillusioned about their professed devotion to the poverty and charity of Christ. Now, we know that hospitals cannot be run without money. We know also that there will always be what the world calls "chiselers," and that in due course we will be done out of a certain amount of legitimate fees. But what St. Vincent de Paul said of his communities is true of all religious communities. "The community need never fear of failing from lack of money. The only thing we have to fear is wealth." In this he was merely reiterating the teaching of his Master who had said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matt. 5:3). The poor in spirit trust in God, and God provides.

One of the most touching scenes in the New Testament is that of St. Peter and St. John going to the temple one afternoon to pray. As they passed through the gate called "Beautiful," they were solicited by a lame beggar. He looked up at them eagerly, hoping to receive something from them. But Peter looked at him and said, "Silver and gold I have none; but what I have, that I give thee. In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, arise and walk" (Acts 3:6). And we then read that

the man leaped up and began to walk like other men for the first time in his life. It seems that there is a certain divine correlation between the lack of money and the accomplishing of the work of God.

It is recorded that once, during a particular era of the papacy, when wealth was prolific and the Supreme Pontiff was seemingly more interested in being a patron of the arts and culture than in being a shepherd of souls, the Pope pointed with pride to the treasures of the Vatican and boasted, "No longer need Peter say, 'Silver and gold I have none.'" A holy cleric who was present, heartsore at the lack of zeal in high places, thereupon remarked, "No, and no longer can he say, 'I say to thee, arise and walk!'"

Those of us whose work is not connected with ministrations to the physically poor in hospitals might still, with profit, examine our attitude towards the physically poor with whom we come in contact within our own community. Do we find ourselves impatient toward those with whom we live who are chronically ailing? Are we inclined to judge them rashly, regarding their exemptions from practices and prescriptions of the rule as self-indulgence, without knowing their true condition? Do we mentally label them as hypochondriacs and even speak about them so, without, perhaps, realizing the sufferings that some Religious bear because of just such tactics on the part of their fellows? Within the limits of our rule, do we do what we can to help cheer the ailing in our convent, without thought of their gratitude or appreciation?

Perhaps we could sum up the whole question of love of the physically poor by asking ourselves if we truly and habitually see Christ in the sick with whom we come in contact. We have God's own word for it that what we do to the sick, we do to Him. He has demonstrated this on many occasions in many startling ways. A notable example was that of Alfred of Cordova, a Dominican Friar. One day, trudging along a dusty road in Spain, he saw, stretched helplessly by the roadside, a man ulcerated from head to foot with hideous leprosy. The hot noon sun beat fiercely on his head. Everyone who passed fled from him. He looked up at the priest with list-

less eyes, and with a faltering voice pleaded for help. Whispering a few words of comfort, the friar removed his own cloak, tenderly wrapped it about the stricken man, and carried him in his arms to the monastery. He laid him on his own narrow cot and went to the kitchen for some food. Returning with the food, he approached the bed. The leprous man was dead. But as the friar pulled back the cloak that concealed him, he saw to his amazement that on the man's head was a crown of thorns. On his hands and feet were the marks of nails, and forth from a wounded side streamed fresh blood. The holy man knew that the unfortunate one he had lifted from the roadside was Christ, his God and his Savior.

Now, Christ is not going to show Himself as plainly as this in the physically poor we meet or associate with, but He will be there just as truly as He was in the roadside leper. To paraphrase Caryll Houselander's beautiful figure, we can say that, with our spirit of faith, we will be like a blind person learning with the touch of caressing fingers the features of the face we cannot see. We will find the face of Christ in every human face. And because we are seeking with a means more sensitive than sight, we will not be misled by the mutilation, the dirt, or tears, or ingratitude. Beyond all these we will discern the invisible beauty of Christ abiding in each of these physically poor.

We may now consider our attitude toward the mentally poor. We refer to those who lack mental stability, who range all the way from actual insanity to the more highly developed grades of downright stupidity. Is there, then, any difference between our attitude toward the dull, slow-witted, exasperating pupil and the smart, pretty girl who has let it be known that she might be considering entering the convent? Do we become impatient with the slow pupil, and, perhaps, show ridicule and contempt toward him? Are we conscious of the harm we might do to a child's personality by such a course of action? Do we discourage laughter at him by other pupils when he gives a wrong answer? It is the mentally poor pupil who should be the special object of our love and solicitude as a Christian.

It helps in the profession of teaching to work as if we expected wonders, but not to be disappointed if we achieve very little. After all, it would seem to be a permissible inference from Our Lord's parable of the sower and the seed to say that, in an unselected group, the best result that could be expected is twenty-five percent success. The sower went out to sow his seed. Some fell by the wayside, some fell upon a rock, some fell among thorns, and some fell upon good ground. Only the latter of the four places produced fruit a hundredfold. Even in the especially screened and selected apostolic college, the student body of twelve produced only one, St. John, who passed his final examination and was at the feet of Christ on Calvary. One, Judas, failed completely. The other ten could pass only conditionally.

To continue our self-examination on the mentally poor, what is our treatment of the lay help with whom we work in our institution? Perhaps among them are those who are not quick of perception, who are slow-witted and dull mentally. Do we treat them with the patience and respect that are due to members of Christ's Mystical Body?

What about our attitude toward the mentally poor within the community? Is there someone who seems always to be saying the wrong thing, who is always offending against prudence in speech? Perhaps there are those who are downright boorish and boring in their conversations. Do we try to be as gracious with them as with the most charming of our companions? Do we try to avoid sitting near them during recreation? Do we uncharitably publicize the latest blunder made by one of these mentally poor, waiting till we have a good audience and then saying, "Did you hear her latest? Of course I would not say anything, if it weren't so good, but this is really good!" Do we recall that when we have finished speaking, someone is either more loved and respected, or less loved and less esteemed? Are we spreading peace or war, heaven or hell, happiness or unhappiness?

If we are Religious with college degrees, what is our attitude

toward members of the community who do not have such degrees? Do we look down on them in any way, feeling that they are, thereby, inferior to us, forgetting that, as Chesterton said, there is a Catholic way of learning everything, even the alphabet. And the Catholic way of learning the alphabet is, he says, not to look down on those who cannot learn it.

Finally, then, we come to a brief consideration of our attitude toward the spiritually poor, those who lack virtue, the sinners, those guilty of noticeable public faults, the incorrigibles. In school work it is so easy to conceive a sort of grudge against malicious boys or girls. After a few unsuccessful attempts to change them, we let them alone as long as they cause no disturbance and hope we will be rid of them soon. Yet they need our help most. They are the ones who are in the greatest poverty. We might ask ourselves when was the last time that we prayed specifically at Holy Communion and at other times for some particular boy or girl in our class who was mischievous and troublesome? If we think we can help them without prayer and sacrifice, we are presumptuous and mistaken. Christ has told us that we must imitate Him in His love of the poor. One of the best ways to help the spiritually poor is through prayer. Therefore, we must pray for the spiritually poor in our classes. Saint Augustine, in speaking to those who teach religion to young people said that they "should rather say much on his behalf to God than say much to him about God" (*De catechizandis rudibus*).

What of the spiritually poor among those with whom we live? Are there Religious with noticeable public faults? Do I think unkindly about them? Do I talk about their faults to others? What about the Sister who annoys the community with the rattling of her beads, who whispers her prayers in disturbing, audible tones, who is impatient with everyone when she is ill; the Brother who violates the order of the day, who misses exercises, who is, so to speak, a law unto himself? Do we take scandal at their actions? Do we think unkindly about them? Do we talk about their faults to others? Or do we follow the example of Christ and love those Religious while hating their

faults? Do we make our love *effective* by praying for them when we notice their faults? Are we sincere in our prayers, truly desiring their conversion, or are we secretly thanking God that "I am not like the rest of men" (Luke 18:11).

A few ways have been mentioned in which we might sin against the virtue of love of the poor. It is hoped that these few ways will suggest to each of us other instances, instances that could be known only to ourselves. We must remember that, when we fail to love the poor, we are failing to love the special friends of Christ who, He promised, would always be with us. It was with the poor of all kinds that He associated on this earth. It was for them that He came. Because of this, the Pharisees were scandalized and complained to His disciples, "Why does your master eat with publicans and sinners?" The reply of Jesus to this was, "Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' I have come to call sinners, not the just" (Matt. 9:13). They were His spiritually poor. While He was seeking them, He went about healing and curing the physically poor, the lame, the blind, the deaf, and the ill. "And Jesus was going about all Galilee…healing every disease and every sickness among the people" (Matt. 4:23). When He illustrated His profound lesson of charity, He chose as His example the socially poor Samaritan who was despised by the Jews. Again, the socially despised publicans were the object of His love and favors. "Behold a glutton and a wine-drinker," said the Pharisees, "a friend of publicans and sinners" (Matt. 11:19). Not only was He their friend, but He singled them out for special honors. On one occasion when great crowds were assembled as He passed by, out of all the crowd He called to Him one Zacchaeus, a leading publican, and He stayed at his house. The crowds murmured because He was the guest of a man they considered a sinner. The response of the gentle Christ was this: "Today salvation has come to this house…For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:9-10). It is well known, of course, that His apostle Matthew was also a socially poor publican whom He made one of His closest friends.

Most obvious in His own life was His financial poverty. "The Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Matt. 8:20). He in no way placated the mighty and powerful and influential of the world. It was the rich, the so-called holy, and the learned, who were His bitterest enemies. The rich Sadducees, the holy Pharisees, and the learned Scribes were the ones who hated and persecuted Him, and had Him put to death. Finally, by His own admission, He will judge us on the last day by our attitude toward all the various kinds of poor, His special friends.

Hence, our love of the poor should be a matter of no small concern to us. It is an essential part of our Imitation of Christ and of our living the supernatural life, and of the degree of happiness we attain, both on this earth and in heaven. Therefore, in order to simplify the whole question of the poor, let us say that they can be considered in two ways.

First, the various kinds of poor constitute a group which, on the whole, is naturally difficult to love. They are not the kind of people to whom our heart goes out spontaneously in natural attraction. In the book of Proverbs we read, "The poor man shall be hateful even to his own neighbor" (Prov. 14:20). So when Our Lord commanded us to love our neighbor, it was the naturally difficult to love that He had in mind particularly. He knew that, human nature being what it is, we would not have to be commanded to love the lovable, even though we might have to learn to supernaturalize our natural love for them. "If you love those who love you," He said, "what reward shall you have? Do not even the Publicans do that?" (Matt. 5:46). However, if, by exercising the supernatural power of charity which we received at Baptism, we fulfill the commandment to the extent that we love the unlovable, then we can be reasonably confident of supernaturalizing our natural love for the naturally lovable. The greater contains the less.

Secondly, we should consider the poor as anyone who needs anything we have to give, whether it be time, sympathy, help, goods, word of comfort, or whatever we may have to give. There is no one

so great who is not in some way or in some thing inferior to and dependent upon others. To that extent, he is poor in their regard. And there is no one so lowly but that he can help another, and that other, to that extent, is poor in his regard.

So, then, our love of the poor resolves itself into our habitual attitude toward two classes of people—those who naturally are difficult to love, and those who need anything that we have to give them.

We can be sure that, if we are living on the first floor of sensuality or passion, we will not have the proper attitude toward the naturally unlovable. We will be tossed to and fro by our feelings like a ship on the waves. We will inevitably avoid opportunities to come in contact with the poor, or will treat them unkindly, if our feelings so prompt us at the moment. We will not "feel like" helping those who need our help at the moment.

If we are living on the second floor of reason or common sense, we will rationalize our neglect of the various kinds of poor, rationalize our treatment of them, rationalize our failure to help those who need or ask our help. We will find ourselves saying, "Let someone else do it. I haven't the time. I have enough work of my own to do. I can't be listening to everyone's troubles. If I do it for him this time, he will be after me again. There is only one way to treat that kind of person. If you let him, he will become intolerably domineering and demanding. Someone has to tell him off. He should know better," and so on, *ad infinitum*. It is only by living habitually on the third floor of faith and charity that we can have the attitude of Christ-like charity toward the poor that our vocation as a Christian and Religious demands of us.

But how can we do this? How can we be sure that we are really loving the poor according to the command of Christ? Here is a test for ourselves. Here, again, are proposed more of the little keys we promised at the start of the book. This time there are two keys to the third floor of the supernatural regarding love of the poor. The first key, considering the poor as the naturally unlovable, is this: be especially kind to those you do not like, for the sake of Christ. The sec-

ond key, considering the poor as those needing something I have or can give them, is this key which Christ, Himself, has given us: "Give to everyone who asks of thee" (Luke 6:30). If habitually, day after day, in all kinds of situations, I am especially kind to those I do not like naturally, and if I habitually give to those who ask of me, whoever they may be, if I give cheerfully, spontaneously, without thought of return, then I know that I am living on the third floor of faith; then I know that I am using my share in God's nature to love as He loves, that is, to love all men universally, independently of my natural attraction for them.

Again, let it be noted, that loving the poor in this way is a practice that cannot be followed by unaided human nature. It is supernatural and, therefore, it takes the help of grace and prayer, and, particularly, prayer during temptation.

This habit of praying during temptation is a factor which is too often neglected in our struggles against the powers of darkness, and, yet, it is of paramount importance. St. Alphonsus, great theologian that he was, always insisted upon it. It is related of him that during the later years of his life, with the experience of an octogenarian behind him, he was asked by a group of his priests what he would choose to preach about if he had only one sermon remaining to be delivered in his lifetime. He pondered the question for some time. The priests waited anxiously to hear his answer. They expected that he would name some such topic as grace, or charity, or the love of God. Finally he answered them to this effect: "If I had but one sermon left to preach, I would speak on the necessity of praying during temptation. I would do this because, no matter how much charity or love or grace a person might have, he would lose it all in an instant if he were to fall into grievous sin. We are in the habit of praying before temptation so that we will not fall into sin, and after we have succumbed to temptation, we pray to say that we are sorry. But the most important time to pray is in the midst of temptation. The devil is much more powerful than we, and, if we are to overcome him, we need the help of the Lord."

There is no substitute for divine help in fighting against temptation, If we do not call for it, we are not only acting unwisely, but our very desire to win becomes suspect. To make this clear, suppose a soldier was set to guard an outpost and was warned by his commanding officer that, if an attack should occur, he should immediately call for reinforcements. If the attack did take place and the soldier neglected to call for available aid, his loyalty could rightly be questioned. So, too, if during the onslaughts of temptation from the devil, we do not pray for the supernatural help which God is waiting to give us, we cannot be thought to be vitally interested in winning the struggle.

Thus, we can say that if we are to acquire the habit of loving the poor, as Christ did, and as He would have us do, we must also have the habit of praying during temptation. The habit of loving the poor will not be acquired by taking only a vague, general resolution that from now on we are going to love the poor and to pray when tempted not to love them. Like any virtue, it will be acquired only by long repeated resolutions to perform particular acts of that virtue. And, as with the acquiring of any virtue, the best starting point is those instances in which we know in our hearts we most fail. Honest self-examination will reveal many of those instances to us.

Is it a spiritually poor person with noticeable public faults who is the occasion of our failure? Today, then, when we see that person commit a fault, and we are tempted to criticize her to ourselves or others, we will say an aspiration or prayer for her. During the day, when the actual situation arises, no doubt the force of habit will make itself felt and we will find the unkind words ready to tumble from our lips, like swallows from a barn on a spring morning. At that moment, if our resolution has been sincere and well planned, the grace of God will remind us of it, and we must then begin to pray. “Dear Jesus, help me to keep back these words.” After we say something like that, the urge to say the unkind words may probably be all the stronger. So we must keep on praying. “Dear Lord, forgive her. Help her to become conscious of that fault and conquer it. Dear

Lord, help me to think of my own faults instead of those of others. Thank you, dear Lord, for your grace without which I would be worse than she." And we must continue to pray in this way until the temptation has passed. If we really pray, we will just as truly conquer.

Again, to continue our self-examination, is it a mentally poor person who is annoying us, toward whom we have unkind feelings? Today we resolve that at least once we are going out of our way at recreation or at some other particular time to be with him or her and treat him or her especially graciously. And we resolve to pray for help when we are tempted, either not to do this, or to let it go until later.

Is there a physically poor person who bores us with his tales of woe and ailments? Today we are going to give him our sympathetic ear with no signs of boredom. Today, when we are working on something that we are particularly anxious to get done, if someone interrupts us to talk of something that is on his mind, we will listen as if his were the most important troubles in the world.

Let it be repeated that if these resolutions are to be effective, they must be as *particular* as possible. We should try to particularize them with reference to time, and person, and place. And in every instance there must be the accompanying resolution to pray when we are tempted not to fulfill them. We might well recall what was said in the chapter on obedience about the psychological effect of writing out the resolution in full in a little book or on a piece of paper. It thereby becomes a personal challenge and a reminder to us when the situation arises.

At night, there must be sincere examination of ourselves to see whether we have kept our resolutions. If we have, let us thank God for it. If we have not, we should tell Him we are sorry, and ask Him for help on the following day. On the morrow, we should make a similar resolution, being concerned, first of all, with our most notable failure as it was revealed by our self-examination. And if we do this day after day, gradually, almost imperceptibly, we will have ac-

quired the facility of habitually being kind to those we do not like, and of giving them whatever we have that they need, whether it is time, a helping hand, a sympathetic ear, or whatever we have to give. Only then will we begin to realize the tremendous significance of the second of the two great commandments, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Mark 12:31). We will begin to realize that the whole aim of the religious life, the whole of the spiritual life, the whole of the supernatural life is charity. This is the be-all and end-all of our existence.

Only then will we begin to realize the true distinction between means and end in the religious life. Then we will never be guilty of such an anomaly as refusing to help a fellow Religious because at that time we had planned to do our spiritual reading, or to make our visit to the Blessed Sacrament, or were going to say our Rosary. When we are habitually living on the third floor of faith, we will experience the knowledge that our rules, our spiritual reading, our Rosary, our confessions, our Holy Communions, our visits to the Blessed Sacrament, the priesthood, the episcopacy, the Sovereign Pontiff himself, are *means* alone. Let us read that again and burn it into our minds. All these things are not ends in themselves but means to help us to love God and our neighbor better. They are means to be used to kindle in our hearts the fire of charity, so that, when we have an opportunity to love our neighbor and to do charity actively, we will be conditioned to grasp the opportunity. St. Vincent de Paul told his Daughters of Charity that, if the occasion demanded it, they were even to leave Mass to help the sick, for they were thereby leaving God *for* God. Therefore, if Religious were to refuse to help one another or were to neglect a chance to love the poor because at a particular time they are engaged in spiritual reading, or the Rosary, or other personal, private devotions, they would be missing the whole point of the Christian life. They are trying to prepare themselves by their devotions to love their neighbors and the poor, while neglecting the very occasion for which they are preparing.

A true saint never neglects an opportunity for charity. And if we

are truly sincere in looking for the best way to increase our love of the poor, we will not only give gladly to those who ask, but we will always be cheerful about it, never complaining, amenable to all demands. "Whoever wishes to become great among you," says Our Lord, "shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave" (Matt. 20:26-27). A saint never complains at the demands made upon her, but is always cheerful. So, if we want to be saints, we should try to gain a reputation for being almost a simpleton. Be the kind of Religious that anyone can call on at anytime for anything. Be the kind of whom they will say, "Ask Sister Helen. She will do it for you; she will give it to you; she will help you." "Just see Brother Joe. He'll always help." It is refreshing to read what St. Paul has to say on this matter of giving: "Mark this:" he says, "he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Let each one give according as he has determined in heart, not grudgingly or from compulsion, for 'God loves a cheerful giver'" (2 Cor. 9:6-7).

The Little Flower, St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, was a perfect example of this teaching in action. She really loved the poor, that is, all those who needed her help. She realized that true charity was coextensive with forgetfulness of self. We read in her autobiography: "I must not be obliging in order to appear so, in the hope that later on the Sister I oblige will do the same for me." And then she recalls Our Lord's words: "If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive in return, what merit have you? For even sinners lend to sinners that they may get back as much in return" (Luke 6:34).

She knew that her readiness to oblige would cause her to be treated as God's simpleton, but that was her goal, to be a fool for the sake of Christ. She says, "Less ceremony is used in asking the help of those who are always ready to oblige." Therefore, she concludes, "I must not keep out of the way of those Sisters who are always seeking my help, for Our Divine Master has said, 'From him who would borrow of thee, do not turn away'" (Matt. 5:42). So her rule of conduct was this: "It is not enough for me to give to him who asks. I ought to

forestall his wishes, appear very grateful, highly honored at being able to help him" (*Autobiography*, pp. 166-167).

Of course, saint that she was, little Thérèse had the virtue of supernatural prudence, which meant that she realized that there were occasions in which it would not be true charity to carry out to the letter the words of the gospel to give to those who ask. She understood that her Master did not command the fulfillment of unwise, imprudent, or illegitimate needs of her neighbor. These are not true needs at all. To cater to them would be a perversion of true charity. Yet, even in these circumstances there is place for genuine love of the poor, as she so well teaches us. She says, "Occasions arise when I am compelled to refuse a request. Yet when charity has taken deep root in the soul, it shows itself outwardly, and there is always a way of refusing so graciously what one cannot give that the refusal affords as much pleasure as the gift itself." This is true love of the poor in action.

True charity means that we give freely and spontaneously and cheerfully what is ours to give. Note the phrase, "what is ours to give." That is our safeguard against misguided zeal. If our rule or order of the day demands that we be in a certain place at a certain time, then, barring unforeseen emergencies, that precise time is not at our own disposal. It is not ours to give, for it has been given already to the Lord. Remembering this, we will not fall into the error of attempting to substitute, in normal circumstances, acts of so-called charity for our times of formal prayer and exercises of rule. Too often such acts are motivated by self-gratification rather than by love of God or our neighbor. For example, if a Sister were to visit the sick every evening during the time for evening meditation, she would not be truly loving the poor, for she would be giving what was not hers to give. Love of the poor means, let us repeat it, that we are ready always to give to those who ask, what is *ours* to give.

Let us summarize, then. The whole aim of the religious life is charity, the fulfilling of Christ's command to love God and our neighbor as ourselves. The most difficult part of this commandment

is to love the naturally repulsive, the poor, for the sake of Christ. The key to loving the poor is twofold: first, to be especially kind to those we do not like, and, secondly, to give to all those who ask of us, without counting the cost to ourselves. We will act spontaneously in this way only when we have acquired the habit of doing so. The only way we will acquire this habit is to make repeated resolutions, day after day, resolutions which are as particular as possible with regard to person, time, and place. These resolutions, of course, must be coupled with an added resolution to pray when we are tempted not to fulfill them, and their achievement vigilantly checked in sincerely-made particular examens.

When we have so acquired such a habit of love of the poor that it is our characteristic reaction in every possible situation, when we habitually live on the third floor of faith, not acting merely from common sense or reason, when we are habitually loving the poor as Christ did, when we are practicing the fifth Beatitude, "Blessed are the merciful," then only will we begin to reap here and now the blessed mercy which Christ promised as the reward for this Beatitude, the freedom from misery, which we call happiness.

5. Love of the Cross

Our Divine Savior, when He was on earth, went about doing good and, especially, being kind to the poor. It is a sad commentary on the gratitude of human beings that they repaid all this goodness by nailing the kind and loving Savior to a rough-hewn cross. His whole nature revolted at the suffering He was enduring, but He nevertheless resigned Himself completely, saying to His Father, "Not my will but thine be done" (Luke 22:42). Since the disciple is not above the Master, we must expect as we advance on the road of love of God that there also will be crosses in our lives.

If we have imitated Christ in the practice of the earlier Beatitudes, and have overcome our weak desires for riches, reputation, and pleasure; if we have practiced the fourth Beatitude and approached with zeal our positive duty; if we have followed the fifth Beatitude by being merciful, giving to those in need; if we have loved the poor, then Christ will reward us by communicating Himself to us in a very real way. The exact nature of this communication cannot be easily explained in words. As the Psalmist said, we must "taste and see that the Lord is sweet" (Psalms 33:9). As a result of this communication, what we have known before of the truths of our faith becomes very real to us. What we had learned before about, for example, the mysteries of the Blessed Trinity and the Incarnation, and the role of the Blessed Mother in our lives, begins now to be realized.

We have then reached the stage of the sixth Beatitude and are

tasting its fruits. "Blessed," says Our Lord, "are the clean of heart, for they shall see God" (Mat. 5:8). To be clean of heart in this sense means, according to St. Thomas, to see God in all things, to look through all the circumstances surrounding things that happen to us to see directly to the core of things and there discern the holy will of God. Those who do this are the truly clean of heart. They are the Christ-like.

The perfections of God are revealed in Christ, His Son, especially in Christ's compassion for suffering humanity or His love of the poor, and also in His own voluntary choice of poverty, pain, and humiliation. Therefore, our likeness to Christ as His followers will be seen among men in our love of the poor, and in our willingness to share in Christ's poverty, pain, and humiliation. Our Lord has said, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matt. 12:34). And again, "By their fruits you will know them" (Matt. 7:20). Our Christ-likeness will shine forth in our attitude toward the will of God, particularly when that will involves what we call a cross, something difficult, disagreeable, or annoying, something unwanted. We must make up our mind that, whether we like it or not, whether we are good, bad, or indifferent, there *will* be crosses in our lives. Since this is inevitable, our happiness must necessarily depend upon our attitude toward these crosses.

Now, what should be the attitude of a Christian toward crosses? In order to explain this, it is necessary to say, by way of prelude, that there is one fact of which we must be absolutely and eternally convinced if we are to have a proper attitude toward crosses. We will try to make this clear in the way the writer does frequently in school. At a quiet moment during class, he drops a book on the desk with a crash. Then the question is asked, "Why did that book fall?" The first answer offered is generally that it fell because of the law of gravity, which is true enough as far as it goes. Then, "Is there any other reason why it fell?" After a pause, someone will advance the thought that it fell because the teacher willed to make it fall, which, again, is true. Is there any other reason why it fell? As a rule, this question is

greeted with silence and puzzled frowns. Sometimes it happens that after much cajoling and coaxing someone will say apologetically, "Could it have fallen because God willed it?" Could it? Most certainly it could! The first and foremost reason why anything happens in this world is because God wills it.

There are three types of causes operating in the world; divine, human, and physical. Consequently, in every action involving human beings, there are three causes operating, three reasons why anything happens. There is physical nature operating according to God's laws; there is the will of the human beings concerned; and, most important of all, there is God's will. Nothing happens unless God wills or permits it. There are many who are not really catholic (here the word catholic is used in its sense of universal), who see only part of the causes for things happening. They do not see all of the causes. For example, the scientist sees only the physical cause. The philosopher sees only the human cause. Then there are the fatalists, like Calvin, the absolute predestinarians, who see only the divine cause in operation, with no human cause in the true sense.

But being truly Catholic means that we see all three causes operating simultaneously. It means that we realize that whatever happens, happens first and foremost because of God's will, either commanding or permitting it. Even what we are accustomed to think of as evil can only happen because God permits it. So, St. Augustine said, "God deemed it wiser to permit evil that He might draw good out of it than not to permit evil." St. Paul says, "Where the offense has abounded, grace has abounded yet more" (Rom. 5:20). It is for this reason that the Church actually rejoices about the sin of Adam during her Holy Week liturgy. As she blesses the paschal candle she sings, "*O felix culpa*," "O happy fault, which merited to have such and so great a redeemer."

Since, then, whatever happens, happens only because God wills or permits it, our chief concern as professed lovers of God should be to conform our will to His as perfectly as we can. Now, there is a twofold phase to this conformity of wills between God and us, name-

ly, active and passive, or positive and negative. We conform our will to God's will positively when we do what is commanded and avoid what is forbidden by Him through legitimate authority, namely, His Church, our Superiors, our rule, and our order of the day. In other words, we conform our will positively or actively to God's will when we imitate Christ in His obedience and His love. Negative or passive conformity to God's will lies in this, that, whenever anything happens without our choice, whether it be adverse or constructive, we accept all with a calm mind as coming from the paternal hand of God. The reason we do this is because it is pleasing to God, and we thereby imitate our Lord who said negatively, "I have come down from heaven not to do my own will" (John 6:38), and positively, "I do always the things that are pleasing to Him" (John 8:29). Doing God's will means, actively, doing what is commanded or desired by legitimate authority; passively, it means graciously wanting and accepting whatever God wills should happen to us. This latter aspect of doing God's will is what is meant by loving the cross.

To be explicit, loving the cross means that we will what God wills, and will not what God wills not for us. We love the cross when we want what God wants for us. St. Paul says, "For those who love God all things work unto good" (Rom. 8:28). And he meant literally all things, the good, the bad, the indifferent.

It is failure to realize this which leads to so much unhappiness. We cannot be unhappy unless we are blindly willing and choosing according to our own judgment of what we think is best for us, and not in accordance with God's judgment. A little thought will show this to be so. For we are happy only when we get what we want. But, things being as they are, we can never get everything that we want in this world. So, then, the way to be happy is to want what we do get. That is the only way we can get what we want. And when we want what we do get, then it is that we want what God gives to us, and what God wants us to have. What God wants us to have is the best thing for us. Contentment is as simple as that.

In thinking about this, we must realize that it is not the despotic

will of a cruel tyrant with which we are concerned. Rather, we must remember that it is God's will, God, who is infinite wisdom, and goodness, and power. Since God is infinitely wise, He knows what is best for us; since He is infinitely good, He wants what is best for us; and being infinitely powerful, He can and will do what is best for us.

Conformity to God's will, therefore, necessarily brings happiness, since it is for this purpose that He made us. In what other way can we explain His command, "He who does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me" (Matt, 10:38)? He not only asks us to take up our cross, but He promises to help us in bearing it. "My yoke is easy, and my burden light" (Matt. 11:30). If the cross is not sweet to us, it is because we do not take up our burden rightly. It is because we are living on the wrong floor of the human house.

If we are living on the first floor of feeling or passion, we will rebel at the cross. We will sulk and make ourselves and others unhappy and miserable with our complaints. Incidentally, it might be noted that one of the signs of a lost vocation is chronic complaining. In most defections it has been found that the person was an habitual complainer, first about her companions and then about Superiors. But, to continue, if we are living on the second floor of reason or common sense, we will tend to rationalize things and find every possible excuse why we should not submit to the cross. It is only on the third floor of faith that we will see the cross as a mark of God's favor and graciously accept whatever He sends us.

No attempt will be made here to give an imposing array of reasons for loving the cross. We often see long expositions on motives for accepting the inevitable crosses and difficulties of life. They range all the way from Pollyannism, such as, "If life hands you a lemon, open a lemonade stand," to actually good, sensible, natural motives. Writers emphasize that character is developed by difficulties, that we are thus made more sympathetic to others' suffering, that nothing worthwhile is accomplished without hardship, all of which are quite true. But for a supernatural person, living on the third floor of faith, there is only one real, worthy motive for accept-

ing God's will in difficult things. That motive is this: that it is more pleasing to God, Our Father.

A man who truly loves God, and knows that God loves him, accepts what God sends because he knows that is best, however difficult it may seem at the moment. If he is living by faith, he has complete trust that whatever God sends is best for him. He has that view of life which Father Tabb describes so beautifully in one of his poems, in which he compares life to the weaving of a tapestry between God and me. Each moment of the day, God is pushing the threaded needle down, and I am pushing it up again. And so we weave. But all I see is the underside of the tapestry, the tangled skein of multicolored, knotted threads, twisted in a snarl of confusion and incomprehensible pattern. But God sees the upper side, the beautiful likeness of Himself being worked out in my life. And someday I, too, will see that upper side. Then I will know what I now may only believe with my supernatural power of faith, that each of those knots and each abrupt change of color and pattern has meaning and purpose, that if just one knot were missing, the picture would be marred.

So, the attitude we should have toward the cross is this: since whatever happens, happens only because God wants or allows it to happen, therefore we show our love for Him by graciously accepting whatever happens as coming from the hands of our loving Father who, alone, knows what is best for us. Our attitude should be like that of the young girl at boarding school. At twenty years of age, she was already the victim of a mortal disease. On her desk she always kept a strange-looking piece of paper. It was quite blank except at the bottom of the page where she had signed her name. To a friend she confided, "God can write whatever He wants there. I have already signed it."

But we might ask whether such love of the cross means that because we want what *is*, we thereby want what is to stay as it is? Does it mean that we are fatalists or quietists who are satisfied to do nothing about injustice and wrongdoing and sickness? Not at all. Loving the cross does not mean that we must do nothing about remedying

evil situations which may constitute our cross. It does not at all mean that we are satisfied to let evil continue to exist simply because God permits it. What we love it not the situations behind our crosses. We only love God's will which is allowing or causing those situations. God wants us to do what we can to remedy the evil so that the future will not be the same as the present. We are not fatalists. But at any given moment, what is, *is*, and therefore, is God's will, and that is what we want for the *now*. The next moment God's will may be different. That is what we must want then. It is His will, and not the thing that is happening, that we must love.

Therefore, we should do our best to correct evil situations, and even pray that God will remedy them. This is what Our Lord did in the Garden. He prayed to the Father that the cross be removed from Him. "Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass away from me" (Matt. 26:39). But once we have prayed and done our best to remove the evil, we leave it up to God's good pleasure, as Christ did, whether or not He removes our cup of bitterness. Our job is to keep on wanting what God wants, as long as the situation exists.

If we have this attitude toward the cross, there will be no such thing as worry in our lives. For worry is simply the fear of getting the evil that we hate; or of not getting the good that we love. For example, we worry about examinations which we are to take. Since, when the results of the examination are known, all we can receive is praise or blame, honor or dishonor, it shows that at the moment we worry, we are motivated by vainglory. We are either seeking honor or trying to avoid dishonor. Otherwise, we would leave the results up to God. The way to get rid of worry, of course, is to have the right motive for what we do, to be living on Faith's third floor. Now, there can be only three possible classes of motive for doing anything: sensuality or a bodily motive on the first floor; the second floor motive of the mind, vainglory; or the third floor motive of the spirit, faith, love of God, conformity to His will, abandonment to Divine Providence, confidence in His wisdom, goodness, and power to give us what is best for us. Therefore, to get rid of worry, we can turn to any one of

these three. We may turn to sensuality and indulge those of the senses that will give us sufficient pleasure to forget that particular worry. Or, we can work so hard that we get brain weary and so bring on sleep. We can make ourselves "too tired to worry." The same thing may be accomplished through drugs or narcotics. Or, finally, we can turn to the love of God and conform our will to His in faith, as Christ and Mary did, and say, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38). "Not as I will, but as thou willest" (Matt. 26:39). The one true answer to the problem of worry is to live by faith.

If we are living on the third floor of faith, we will not be so constantly concerned about the welfare of our families at home, a worry to so many Religious. The only remedy for fear and worry is faith in God's goodness. It is well to remember that God loves our family more than we ever possibly could. If there is in our hearts even a tiny spark of affection, love, and solicitude for our mother, our father, or our family, it is only because that spark is a faint, dull reflection of the brilliant, burning love that God has for them. We must believe that He can take care of them better than we ever could, for that is true. Whatever we could do for them, even if we were at home with them, God can accomplish in an instant, in a million ways. He has their best interests at heart. No matter what happens to them, it is best for God's purpose and best for them. This is true, even if what happens to them is something we would not choose if we were living on the first or second floor of the human house. For what happens to them is exactly what God wants, and that is always the best. We should strive to imitate the beautiful trust evinced by our Blessed Mother in accepting the bad and the good all through her life. When she said, "Be it done to me according to thy word," she accepted God's will in its entirety, with all its consequences. At the moment that she said, "*Fiat*," and received the Holy Spirit as the wedded love of her soul, she also consented to receive her dead Son in her arms. The trust which accepted the utter sweetness of the Infant Jesus in her hands also accepted the stiff, unresponsive corpse that her

hands embalmed. This was her Son, but even more so, it was God's Son. She trusted God. She understood on earth what many mothers and many Religious will only understand in heaven; she was able to see her boy killed, lying bruised from head to foot, wounded and dead, and fully believe the Father's cry, "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased."[1]

A cross to many Religious is their particular work or duty. Again, it is only when living on the third floor of faith that we can be happy in the work we are given to do. So many times we are tempted to long for different employment. If only we could be teaching instead of nursing. If only we could get out of teaching History and into English. If only we could get out of administration work. If they would ever give me time off for my higher studies. How we would love duty in the sewing room or kitchen, where we would not have to be meeting and dealing with the public. If only we could get out of a hot kitchen and work with children again. It is at times like these that we must recall the principle that, "For those who love God, all things work together unto good" (Rom. 8:28). If we are engaged in any work, until we are removed from it, that employment, and no other, is precisely what God wants us to do. Loving the cross means that we must keep on doing it to please God, Our Father, as long as He keeps willing that we should do it.

In the same way, we should leave up to Him entirely the success of our work. Naturally speaking, we all want to see our work succeed. We should do our best to see that it does succeed, as far as it depends upon us. But the final results must be left to Him without worry on our part. Excessive solicitude about the success of our work, and the using of undue or selfish means, or means contrary to our rules or order of the day, is the surest sign that we are living down on the lower floors of sensuality or vainglory. We want our work to succeed so that we will *feel* good, or so that others will praise and honor us, and we will *look* good. If this were not the case,

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[1] Cf. Caryll Houselander, *Reed of God* (Sheed and Ward, N.Y., 1944), p. 32.

then we would conform our will to God's will in the use of the means as well as in the end we seek.

If we are living on the third floor of faith, we know that sometimes the work that seems the most unsuccessful in the eyes of the world is the most successful in God's eyes. To realize this we have but to read again the story of St. Noel Charbonel. He was one of the North American Martyrs, who died so gloriously. He had taught Hebrew and Greek in a seminary in France, and had taught them very successfully. But his superiors saw fit to send him to the Indian missions in America and Canada. He soon discovered that the missions had no attraction for him whatever. The odors, the food, the way of life, everything about the Indian revolted him; and, in spite of his linguistic ability, he was never able to learn the Indian language. He could hear the confessions only of the French soldiery. He never had the consolation of hearing the confessions of the Indians, the souls he had come to save. He would be sent to fill a vacant mission only until someone could replace him. Then he would be sent on his way to still another temporary mission.

It happened one day that he was away from a village when an enemy tribe attacked the settlement and killed the Christians and the other priest. On his return, a runner met him in the woods and told him the tragic story. When he heard it, the future saint said, "You see, I am not even worthy to be put to death as the others were. I had to be absent when they received the crown of martyrdom." Yet, in the midst of all this discouragement and dislike for his duty, he would never ask for a change. Instead, he knelt in the rustling dead leaves on the forest floor and made a vow of stability to stay on the Indian missions, according to the will of his superiors, until his death. And he went on doing the duties that God gave him to do.

Now, one might ask, why this waste? Why should a brilliant language professor be expended on such ill-suited work for so long? But remember that at the anointing of the feet of Jesus it was Judas who said, "To what purpose is this waste?" (Matt. 26:8). It was not waste because it was done for Jesus. And so, too, with the work that

we have to do. We may not like it. If we had our way, perhaps we would choose much different work. We might even be much more successful at some other work. But if we keep on doing what we are assigned, if we keep on loving the cross that God has sent us, Jesus will accept our sacrifice. It is a sacrifice, make no mistake. But suppose Noel Charbonel had stayed in France. He might have continued to be a successful teacher of Greek and Hebrew, yet in all likelihood none of us would ever have heard of him. As it was, he came to America to the missions, and, in spite of discouragement and apparent failure, he kept doggedly at the work he had to do from perfect obedience. Thereby he became a saint on God's altar. That is the only real success, the only real happiness. And it comes from loving the Cross, from accepting, to please Him, whatever God sends us.

In addition to worry about our families and our work, the cross can come to us in many other forms. It can come to us in the form of criticism which is difficult to bear. Many times our spontaneous reaction to criticism is that it is not true. We would willingly bear it, if it were justified; but this is so wrong, we think to ourselves. Whether it be true or not, let us consider that God has permitted this criticism, and, therefore, we must say "*Fiat*" and bear it as coming from the loving hand of our Father. As St. Peter says in his epistle, "What is the glory if when you sin and are buffeted, you endure it? But if, when you do right and suffer, you take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. Unto this, indeed, you have been called, because Christ also has suffered for you, leaving you an example that you may follow in His steps" (1 Pet. 2:20-21). In other words, "He who does not take up his cross and follow me, is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:38).

Again, our cross can be sickness and lack of health and strength. This can range all the way from headaches and colds to grave and prolonged illness which removes us from regular community duties. Here, of course, is a subject about which volumes could be written. Suffice it here to say that nowhere in God's dealings with men is His will so clearly manifested as in the case of illness. We might even say that illness is more clearly His will than an order

from a Superior, for in the case of illness, no human will has intervened in transmitting God's will to us. Loving the cross in sickness means that, having done all we can to cure it, we must leave the results up to God, and conform our will to His, both in the illness and in our recovery, whether that recovery takes two hours, or two years, or the rest of our lives. As Tauler has said, "One hour of perfect resignation in suffering and sorrow raises the soul to a far higher degree of perfection than could be reached by the practice of good works for a whole week."

Again, our cross can be in the form of a transfer from a mission we have grown to love, or from one duty to another in the same mission. But again, in these circumstances, our only hope for happiness lies in living on the top floor of faith, in realizing that God did not want us any longer where we were, but that He now wants us where we presently are. We know this by faith just as certainly as if He were to appear to us in person and give us written instructions, for nothing happens unless God wills or permits it. What He wants is always best.

Our cross can be any one of a dozen minor irritations, such as bad weather when we are planning a trip, a mountain of papers to correct and grade, slights from others, opposition in our work, lack of appreciation of our efforts, the inconvenient arrangement of our class hours, the drudgery of enforced higher studies, lack of cooperation, antagonism, and rivalry on the part of a Religious who shares a duty with us, and so on. But love of the cross means that we realize that all these things come from the loving hand of God. They are His will. They should be our will too.

The difficulty is that we frequently find ourselves making up our mind to conform to God's will only up to a certain point. After that, well, we just cannot be expected to do any more. And if that little more is added, then watch out! C. S. Lewis in his book, *The Screwtape Letters*, speaks aptly on this point. The devil, who is the subject of the book, is writing to one of his junior tempters working on the destruction of a soul still on earth, and he advises, "Let his

inner resolution be, not to bear whatever comes to him, but to bear it 'for a reasonable period'—and let the reasonable period be shorter than the trial is likely to last. It need not be *much* shorter; in attacks on patience, chastity, and fortitude, the fun is to make the man yield just when (had he but known it) relief was almost in sight."[2] So, it is frequently the devil who is the source of a state of mind which puts a definite time limit on our endurance of the cross.[3]

It is precisely when we feel like giving up, when we have decided that we can stand no more, that the real test of our love of the cross is forthcoming. It is at that moment of crisis that we either move bag and baggage down to the second floor in rebellion, because reason demands that we can not stand any more, or we entrench ourselves more firmly on the third floor in abandonment to God's will and pure love of the cross. It is the mark of those on the second floor to set a reasonable time limit to conformity to God's will. But those on the third floor know that, if God wills the cross to last up to any predetermined limit we might set, He does not, because of our limitations, cease to will the cross beyond that point. Therefore, it is at the precise moment of crisis that the greatest love of the cross is shown; it is at that moment that the greatest effort must be made to say, "*Fiat*."

Does all this seem like too high an ideal for those as frail as we? Is such love of the cross, such conformity to God's will beyond anything we can ever hope to achieve? That may be all right for the saints, but it is beyond us. Perhaps the readers are thinking thoughts like these at the moment. Perhaps thoughts like these have occurred to them before, but they have not made up their minds to do anything about them. It is because of succumbing to these temptations that Religious doom themselves to so much unhappiness.

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[2] *The Screwtape Letters*. By C. S. Lewis (Macmillan, N.Y., 1944), p. 153.

[3] For an interesting and helpful exposition in popular style of the wiles of the devil in the spiritual life, see, in addition to the book quoted, *The Devil You Say*, by Joseph Brieg.

For it is an indisputable fact that happiness can come only from conformity to God's will, by graciously accepting whatever He sends. There is no other course.

But how can such conformity be attained? Certainly it is beyond the powers of human nature, unaided, to love the cross in this way. It is a supernatural thing, and, therefore, it will require supernatural means to reach it. If we sincerely use the means, we will surely attain the end. The supernatural means are prayer, particularly prayer during temptation.

As with habitual imitation of Christ in His obedience and His love of the poor, so, too, the habit of love of the cross is not going to be acquired by a general resolution made one day just in a moment of fervor. Such a resolution will have little or no lasting effect. It takes daily, repeated resolutions to love the cross in definite, particular instances.

And so, we come to another one of our little keys to the apartment on the third floor, this time, the key to the imitation of Christ in His love of the Cross. It is a key that we have already on our key ring, but it also fits another lock which, perhaps, has been barring us from habitual dwelling on the third floor. The key is this: whenever anything happens that we do not like, say the little prayer, "Thanks, God!" In any situation that is displeasing to us, let us say, "Thanks, God!" When we have to rise from bed in the morning, and we would so love to stay, let us say, "Thanks, God!" When we get up in the morning and find that we have a headache, or our arches are aching, again, let us say, "Thanks, God!" When we have to tackle another day of dreaded labor in a classroom, let us say, "Thanks, God!" If a bit of time we had planned to use for ourselves is interrupted, let us say, "Thanks, God!" If someone is interfering with our work and the way we want to do it, let us say, "Thanks, God!" When we say, "Thanks, God!" we show that our will is in true conformity with God's will.

The best starting point for real love of the cross is examination of our daily lives to discover the points where we fail most often, our

own pet little rebellions against the cross and God's will. Having discovered the gravest of these, we make a particular resolution about it. We must make the resolution as particular as possible, trying to anticipate, if we can, the exact time, persons, and place that will be involved. For each of us, our cross will be different. Therefore the resolutions will be different. But the resolutions will all be alike in this respect, that they will all be particularized. With some the cross will be reluctance to attend spiritual exercises. If that is the problem, and it can be a problem and a real cross, then the resolution should be that today we will get to this or that exercise promptly and say, "Thanks, God!" as we start it. With another, the cross may be interference or lack of help from a fellow Religious who is associated with him on a particular duty. Then the resolution must be that today, or this morning, when we are tempted to be angry or sarcastic at lack of help or cooperation, we will say, "Thanks, God!" With still others, the cross may be protracted illness. We have been patient thus far, but, after all, this is too much. We cannot stay in this hospital or this bed forever. We begin to rebel. In this case, our resolution must be: "Today, when thoughts of rebellion come to my mind, I will say, 'Thanks God!' I will keep saying it over and over as long as I find myself thinking these thoughts." As with the other keys previously proposed, if these resolutions are to be effective, the keeping of them must be faithfully checked at the time of our particular examen, and they must be made over and over again.

It must be pointed out that many times we will not *feel* like saying, "Thanks, God!" Things will happen that will make us sorrowful. Things will happen that will arouse our anger. As St. Francis de Sales said, "To prevent the feeling of anger from stirring within us, and to keep the blood from showing itself in our face, cannot be. Happy, indeed, shall we be if we attain to this perfection a quarter of an hour before we die! But to maintain bitterness in our minds in such a wise that, after this feeling has passed, we do not speak with the same gentleness and calmness as before—Oh, this we must take all pains to avoid" (*The Spiritual Conferences*, p. 150). So we may

expect that the first time we try to say, "Thanks, God!" it will be difficult. However, and this must be insisted upon, it is not our feelings but our will that demonstrates our love of God. It might be profitable at this point to turn back to the chapter on obedience and read again what was said there on the question of feelings, for it applies here also in a particular way. Remember, Our Divine Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane, in spite of His feelings to the contrary, prayed, "Not as I will but as thou willest" (Matt. 26:39). That was the proof of His love of the Cross; that was His conformity to God's will which was so pleasing to the Father. So, too, whether we feel like it or not, if we keep saying, "Thanks, God!" we will be showing Him our love of the cross which we bear.

It is only when we have made continued daily resolutions to say, "Thanks, God!" for what we do not like, time after time after time, that we will begin to acquire the ease and facility by which we can say, "Thanks, God!" in every difficult situation. This is the true habit of love of the cross for which we are aiming. If we continue to do this, in spite of all our feelings to the contrary, after a while we will be surprised to find ourselves actually *feeling* like saying, "Thanks, God!" We will begin to taste the happiness which God has promised to those who practice the sixth Beatitude. We will, as a result of being clean of heart and seeing God's will in everything, come to see God and enjoy His happiness right here on earth, for nothing that happens will really bother us again.

When we have reached this state, there will be conformity between God's will and our own. Because we want what God wants, our own will can never be thwarted and we will never be sad or angry or worried. These latter states are the first-fruits of unhappiness. The memory of our thwarted will in the past makes us sorrowful. Not having our own way in the present makes us angry. And the fear that we will not get what we want in the future makes us worried.

But if we love the cross, we will always be happy. We will cast our cares upon the Lord, not being solicitous, not being concerned. We will never be sorrowful over the past, no matter how black it

might be, for that lies in God's mercy which is His greatest attribute. God's "weakness" is that He has a poor memory, we might say with all reverence. If we are sorry for the past, He forgets it. Again, as lovers of the cross, we will not be worried over the future, for that lies in God's providence. Likewise, we will not be concerned about the present, for that is the object of God's love now, and His love for each of us is infinite. That means that it is without limit, not shared and not divided. He loves each of us as if we were the only one in the world to be loved. And because He loves us in this way, then we know He will do for us only what is best for us. That is why our happiness can lie only in wanting for ourselves what God wants, or, in other words, in loving the cross. If we do this, we will be happy at whatever happens because we will always have what we want; we will always be wanting what God wants; and we will be happy because He is happy.

We must keep in mind, of course, that there are three degrees of love, that is, good, better, and best. They are measured in the same way as the degrees of love we bear toward persons. We try to avoid people, if we dislike them; or we merely put up with them; or we are cheerful when they are present; or, the greatest degree of love, we go looking for them, if they are absent. So it is with our love of the Cross. We can rebel at our cross, which is evil; or we can be resigned and put up with it, which is, at least, good. We can go further and be cheerful at the cross, which is better; or, finally, we can be perfect and go out of our way looking for our cross. This is what the Saints did. But, at least, we must aim at being *good*. We must be resigned to the cross and not rebel, lest we be convicted of being evil.

The key to being resigned to the cross, as has been said, is to develop the habit of saying, "Thanks, God!" for whatever happens that we do not like. This is the key which opens the door to the peace and happiness of the third floor of love of the Cross.

6. Love of Enemies

During His life on earth, Our Divine Saviour went about doing good, but showing especial love for the poor. Because of this, He was persecuted and crucified, thereby proving His love of the Cross. And from the heights of the pulpit of the Cross, dripping with His regal blood, He uttered the most loving prayer of all time, "Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

In our efforts to live the supernatural life, our imitation of Christ in His love of His enemies is the pinnacle of Christian virtues. As we grow in holiness, we can expect that God in His Providence will allow others to treat us unjustly. This is true because we acquire virtues by practice. Therefore, if we are going to acquire the Christ-like virtue of love of our enemies, we must have enemies, and these God will surely permit to enter our lives. St. Paul says, "All who want to live piously in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12). Growth in virtue means growth in likeness to Christ. So we will find that as we progress in the practice of the Beatitudes, more and more we will be treated like Christ on the Cross, we will come closer and closer to Him on His Cross. "Blessed are you," He said, "when men reproach you, and persecute you, and speaking falsely, say all manner of evil against you for my sake. Rejoice and exult, because your reward is great in Heaven" (Matt. 5:11-12).

So it was that our Lord gave us the seventh beatitude, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God" (Matt.

5:9). According to St. Thomas, this is the highest practice of the Beatitudes. He says that to make peace shows a man to be a follower of God, the God of peace. That is, the peacemaker spreads peace where you would naturally expect war. Hence, as a reward to the peacemakers, God promised the crown of Divine Sonship.

This virtue of forgiveness, of love of enemies, is a practice which is distinctly Christian and distinctly supernatural. Those who live on the first floor of feeling or passion cannot practice love of enemies, for they are filled with thoughts of revenge. Those who live on the second floor of reason cannot practice it, for it is beyond the powers of human nature always and in all cases to forgive in the Christian sense, "from the heart." The best that unenlightened reason can consistently dictate is an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Here is the underlying cause why the United Nations and similar organizations for world peace will never accomplish lasting results. The nations have, for the most part, none of the Christian virtue of love of enemies which was practiced by Our Divine Lord.

To the example already mentioned of Christ's forgiveness of His enemies from the Cross, we can add His forgiveness of us in the sacrament of penance. As often as we have offended Him, He still continues to forgive us, and so He will continue to do until the end of our lives. Such forgiveness He also asks of us. Shortly after World War II, a beautiful example of this virtue was publicized. A man and woman had lost their only son, an aviator shot down by the Japanese just before V-J Day. With the ten thousand dollars in insurance provided by the government, they established in an American university a scholarship fund for some Japanese boy that he might have the opportunity of learning our American way of life. This was true Christian love of enemies. How different was their conduct from that of Ramón Narváez as Prime Minister of Spain. During his tenure of office, he suppressed three revolutions and signed the death warrant for thirty-five thousand enemies. He died in 1868. It is reported that a priest who had been summoned to his deathbed asked him if he forgave his enemies, to which he replied, "Enemies!

Padre, I have no enemies. I had them all shot!"

In giving His moral precepts to the world, there was one thing upon which Our Lord insisted. That was the necessity of forgiveness. Throughout the Gospels we find Him mentioning it at least twenty-two times, either directly or in parables. "Love your enemies," He said, "do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute and calumniate you" (Matt. 5:44). St. Paul, echoing this doctrine, wrote, "Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse" (Rom. 12:14). The classic illustration of the necessity of forgiveness is, of course, Our Lord's parable of the unjust steward. Father Vincent McCorry, S.J., in his book, *As We Ought*, has done a splendid piece of work in translating and elaborating in modern idiom this parable of Our Lord's, and we take the liberty of quoting at length from his explanation.

"It seems that a certain king, for reasons of his own, determined to find out just where he stood in his financial dealings with the officers of his household, or more accurately, determined to find out where his servants stood in their financial dealings with him. Almost at once, an official was brought in who owed the king ten thousand talents. Our Savior's rustic Galilean audience must have gasped when they heard Him mention that sum. The Jews of our Savior's day calculated according to the Attic talent, and ten thousand Attic talents would have been roughly equivalent to twelve million dollars in modern currency. Our Lord's hearers must have thought: what manner of royal servant was this, who would recklessly sponge upon his king to the tune of twelve million dollars, and what sort of tolerant, easy-going king was this, who would suffer himself to be so put upon? Our Savior's quiet voice pursued the thread of the story. The servant, of course, is penniless. Incredibly, he has wholly squandered that immense fortune which belonged to his lord. The king, surely, has been more than generous, more than patient, but now at last justice must be done. Let the fellow be sold into slavery—he and his wife and children—and let all his possessions be sold, that at least some fraction of the huge debt may be discharged. The foolish,

wasteful servant falls to his knees, over and over again he pleads, 'Have patience with me, have patience with me!' and he adds the wild, unreasoning promise, 'Have patience with me and I will pay thee in full.' Then comes the next surprise in the story. 'And the master, moved with pity for him, let the servant go and discharged him of his debt.' Again our Savior's audience must have stared. The spendthrift servant had asked only for patience, for time in which to pay; and this incredibly gentle king calmly wipes out the whole crushing debt. The servant hurries from the royal presence a free, enormously relieved, and very happy man. He is quit of the old debt, he is wholly forgiven, he can really start again. Perhaps Peter was thinking, 'It must be wonderful to serve a lord like that,' when he looked up and caught our Savior's eye. Then maybe Peter grinned, and pushed back his shoulders, and thought, 'It is wonderful to serve a Lord like that.'

"So the servant went out, and met with a fellow servant of his, who owed him a hundred pieces of silver; whereupon he caught hold of him and took him by the throat and said, pay me all thou owest me. His fellow servant went down on his knees in entreaty. 'Have patience with me,' he said, 'and I will pay thee in full.' But the other refused; he went away and committed him to prison for such a time as the debt was unpaid.

"There are few more painful passages than this in our Savior's oratory. The thing defies comment, for any further remark must be banal and anticlimactic. As we listen to the story, our normal, human feelings are lacerated. We say, 'How could the scoundrel be so blindly cruel? How could he fail to see the shocking implications of his action?' The wicked servant had been forgiven a debt of twelve million dollars, and, a few minutes later, he would not forgive a debt of twenty dollars.

"The rest of the story is a pleasure, for the retribution we long for is swift in coming. The other servants of the king report the monstrous deed of the fellow, and we applaud them for helping the cause of justice. The king, gentle and good as he is, flashes into the

terrible just anger of the gentle and the good. The wretched official is haled before his lord, and now he is permitted to speak not a word. The master gives him his true name: 'Thou wicked servant!' The plain obligation of the servant is plainly described: 'Was it not thy duty to have mercy on thy fellow servant, as I had mercy on thee?' Then comes the satisfying denouement: 'And his master in anger, gave him over to be tortured until the debt was paid.' It was a Roman custom to torture debtors, either to extract from them knowledge of any hidden treasure which they might have laid by, or to move their friends to discharge the debt. Since the wicked servant possessed neither treasure nor friends, we may presume that his torture would continue indefinitely.

"The parable we have rehearsed shows at least two striking characteristics: an inescapable clarity and an extraordinary impact upon the reader. Regrettably, we sometimes allow the second characteristic to interfere with the first. Our understandable indignation with the wicked servant may actually obscure the point of the parable. We can hear the story again and again without ever really hearing the closing sentence: 'It is thus that My heavenly Father will deal with you, if brother does not forgive brother with all his heart.' Apparently, we can read that last sentence again and again, without ever really noticing the final phrase, 'with all his heart.'"[1]

The application of the parable to ourselves is, of course, obvious. We, like the wicked servant, have offended God tremendously as often as we have committed sin, even infinitely in the case of mortal sin, and God in His goodness has wiped out our debt. Then we, in turn, walking from the very tribunal of penance, refuse to forgive the puny little slights and offenses which we suffer from our companions. Unfortunately, we fail to remember that our own forgiveness is conditioned by our forgiveness of others. "When you stand up to pray," said our Savior, "forgive whatever you have against anyone, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you

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[1] *As We Ought*. By Vincent P. McCorry, S.J. (McMullen, N.Y., 1949), pp. 116 ff.

your offenses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive you your offenses" (Mark 11:25-26). In other words, forgiveness or love of our enemies is the best form of spiritual life insurance. It guarantees our own forgiveness upon the payment of the premiums of being forgiving ourselves.

We frequently hear the expression, and, indeed, someone once wrote a song about it entitled, "I'll forgive, but I'll never forget!" Of course, when anyone utters such a statement as that, what she really means is that she'll try to forget, but she'll never forgive. She proceeds to lick her wounds by saying, "After all we have been through together, after all I've done for her, to think that she would do something like that to me, to think she would treat me like that. Oh, I'll forgive her all right, but don't let her come to me looking for favors and help. There'll be no more of those good times we used to enjoy together. Things will never be the same between us again." Suppose God were to treat us like that when we went to confession. Imagine God saying to us, "I forgive you, but I'll never forget it. After all I've done for you, after all I've given you, to think that you would treat Me like that. True, I won't send you to hell, but things will be different now. Don't come running to Me with your prayers for petty little things that I used to give you before. You remember you asked Me for nice weather for your profession day, you asked that your children would do well in the scholarship examination, you asked that you'd be able to get that new statue for the classroom. I gave you all those things, but you needn't come to Me asking for favors like that anymore." What a tragedy that would be! And yet, is that not the way we sometimes treat those who have offended us?

How foolish it is to maintain an attitude like that and yet continue to say the *Our Father* innumerable times during the day. For every time we say this prayer, we ask God to forgive us our offenses as we forgive those who have offended us. We ask Him to forgive us as we forgive them. To the same extent, to the same degree, in the same way as we forgive them, O Lord, that is what we want you to do to us. Then we say to ourselves, "I couldn't forgive her if it were the

last thing I ever did." If we only realized it, what we are doing is asking God to condemn us. What a horrible thought!

So we can see that love of our enemies is essential if we are to hope for forgiveness ourselves. Furthermore, we may make up our minds that there will be so much to forgive in our lives. A young man in college once approached a priest and told him he was about to be married. He then asked naively, "Father, have you any advice to give me?" The priest thought for a moment and then told the boy something to this effect: the most important lesson to learn in marriage is the knowledge of how to forgive. You have promised to love this girl for life, and that means, also, that you have promised to forgive her faults. For you must make up your mind that in marriage there will be much to forgive. This is inevitable when two different human personalities are thrown into such constant close proximity as they are in married life. The same thing can be said of the religious life. One of the most important lessons to be learned is the knowledge of how to forgive. For there will be much to forgive when, not two, but so many different people are living in such constant close proximity as they do in religious life.

The most cursory reflection on the time we have been in the community will show the truth of that statement. But would that same cursory reflection reveal instances in which we had failed in forgiveness? This in spite of Our Lord's admonition, "If thou art offering thy gift at the altar and there rememberest that thy brother has anything against thee, leave thy gift before the altar and go first to be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Matt. 5:23-24). Could it be that this morning or last week we brought to the altar the gift of our own heart in the intimacy of Holy Communion. "Take it Lord," we said, "for your own. I love You, and for love of You I will do anything." But as we knelt there so piously, with eyes cast down and folded hands, was there perhaps in the same chapel a fellow Religious with whom we had had sharp, stinging words the night before? A Superior with whom we are gallingly irritated? A companion of whom we are jealous, whom we secretly

detest, against whose welfare we are secretly plotting? Is there someone we will not forgive? Is there someone to whom we refuse to speak? There are, unfortunately, some alleged Christians who are so un-Christian that they have become almost like vegetables. They live in the same house and sit at the same table with other human beings, never exercising the human faculty of speech, but merely vegetate.

We must be careful to note that this love of enemies, this forgiveness of which we have been speaking, is a particular kind of forgiveness. It is Christian forgiveness, and, according to Christ, that means forgiveness from the heart, and not merely from the lips. "...if you do not forgive your brothers from your heart," He said (Matt. 18:35). We must forgive our enemies freely, not only if they apologize and say they are sorry. The Jews did not repent and profess sorrow while Christ was hanging on the Cross. They didn't speak to Him and say, "We are sorry. We realize we have made a mistake. Try to make yourself as comfortable as you can and we will get you down from there as soon as possible and attempt to make up to you for all this." The very opposite was true. They continued to revile Him, spit upon Him, and hurl stones and insults at His broken person. And in the midst of all that, He prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). In the original language, the verb which St. Luke used meant, "He kept on praying." It was a form of progressive tense. And so, too, our love of our enemies, our imitation of Christ must take place in precisely those instances where forgiveness is most difficult. We must forgive them when others treat us unjustly with no apparent reason, when they do not apologize, when there is no conceivable excuse for their behavior.

For, after all, it is these who are our only enemies. Let us face it. The days of the vendetta are over. It is most unlikely that there is anyone peeking around corners waiting to shoot us from ambush. If physical enemies were the only enemies comprehended under Christ's command of forgiveness, it would be easily fulfilled. The

term enemy is much more inclusive. It embraces all those who may have hurt us or slighted us or insulted us, or injured us in any way. It is they whom Christ has commanded us to forgive. Our treatment of them will be the criteria of God's treatment of us. We must forgive from our heart, not only once, not even up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. In other words, there is no limit to charity. We are commanded to love our enemies in spite of what they do to us, and no matter how often they offend us.

Note well, too, that it is "love" that we are commanded to have for our enemies. Our Lord did not say that we had to *like* them. This whole business, again, is not a matter of feeling. Liking is a matter of feeling; loving is a matter of the will. I am commanded to love you, but, thank God, I am not commanded to like you. I might like you because you are attractive, agreeable, companionable, because we have the same temperament and interests, because you have helped me frequently, are always obliging, or for any one of a dozen reasons. At the same time, I may *not* like you for equally sound or unsound reasons. I do not like the way you walk, the way you hold your head, especially when I look at it from the back; I do not like the way you squint your eyes; I do not like the tone of your voice or your way of talking. Every time you open your mouth, I feel like saying, "Why doesn't she keep quiet?" I might not like your moodiness, or your fawning ways. We all have these likes and dislikes naturally, and often we cannot put our finger on the cause of them. Maybe they are due to the state of our health or our metabolism. We frequently cannot help them, and as long as we do not give in to them, they are part of the cross we must bear in life.

But *loving*, as was said, has nothing to do with liking. Love is a matter of the will. To love someone, particularly an enemy, means that we wish them all the good and happiness and prosperity that God wants them to have in this life and in the next. We wish them this good *effectively*. That is, we do not only refrain from doing anything that would interfere with their good, but we do what we can to contribute to it positively. We are as ready to do an enemy a favor as

a friend, if we love our enemies as Christ would have us do.

Here is the real test of our forgiveness: can we act as if the offense never happened? Are we willing to wipe it off the books? This is the way that God acts with us. He completely forgives us, and acts toward us as if the offense never happened. We are completely restored to His favor. And that is how we should act if our forgiveness is from the heart. The offense may come into our mind again, but we do not let it come into our will. It is not *affective* forgiveness that is demanded but *effective* forgiveness. In other words, it is possible for the will to forgive, even though our feelings refuse to forgive. And if our will has truly forgiven, it means that we will never again refer to the offense. There will be no subtle reminders of how forgiving we are, or of how badly we have been treated. If we do refer to it, we are giving evidence that we are still nursing our injury and we have not truly forgiven from and in our heart.

Let us read that last sentence again and notice that the expression used was "refer to it again," and not "if it comes into our mind again." For if we have been truly injured by someone, we almost cannot avoid its coming into our mind again. The devil himself will see to that. He will besiege us with thoughts of our injury. We will find ourselves mulling over and reliving the offense at the oddest hours and places. It will haunt us on buses, and at meditation in chapel, and at thanksgiving after Communion, when we go to bed at night, and while we are dressing in the morning. But that the thought of the injury comes into our mind does not mean that we have committed a sin. Even if the thought is so persistent and so severe that we find motions of anger and resentment rising within us, we still, up to that point, have not committed sin. It becomes sinful only when we realize that the thought is in our mind, and then we deliberately entertain the thought, and consent to feelings of revenge. It is *consent* to the thought, and to the feelings aroused by the thought, that constitutes sin. If there is no consent, so far is the thought from being a sin that it is actually the positive act of virtue which we perform when we fight against and overcome the tempta-

tion. That is one of the ways we win heaven, by fighting against temptations, and for that reason God permits us to be besieged by them. So we should employ the very same means in overcoming temptations in thought against the virtue of forgiveness as we would for thoughts against any other virtue. The principles are the same.

In trying to acquire the habit of love of our enemies, it might be well to remember the old fashioned ice-box pan. In the dear dead days within the memory of many of us, there were no such inventions as electric refrigerators. The preserving of foods was done by the simple expedient of putting a large cake of ice in the top part of a chest, which, in turn, cooled the lower part which contained the food. Inevitably it happened that the ice melted. This necessitated collecting the water in a shallow pan which rested on the floor beneath the ice box. It requires no extensive knowledge of the principles of physics to realize that this pan had to be emptied at least once a day, depending upon its depth and capacity. One of the major problems of housekeeping in those days was to remember to empty the "ice pan." On many a night, just after retirement, the stillness of the house would be shattered by the alarmed cry of mother, "Did any one empty the ice pan?" If they hadn't, and it was not done then and there, it was a foregone conclusion that by morning the neighbors downstairs would be getting their breakfast in their rubbers. So, just as the ice-box pan had to be emptied once a day, we should make it a practice to empty our hearts once a day of all the grievances which we may have let accumulate there. "Do not let the sun go down upon your anger" (Eph. 4:26).

By this time, it must be obvious that it is no easy thing that Christ asks of us when He asks us to love our enemies. Like the virtues which we have discussed previously, it is beyond the powers of unaided human nature to accomplish, because loving our enemies in this way is supernatural. It cannot be done habitually if we are living on the first floor of sensualism or the second floor of reason. We must be living on the third floor of faith and charity, forgetful of ourselves and our rights, if we are to imitate Christ in this love of

our enemies. For while justice demands its rights, charity does not. "Charity is not self-seeking" (1 Cor. 13:5). We must see things as God sees them, and not be thinking of ourselves and of our pride. Our Lord never asked us to do anything for which He did not, at the same time, give us the means of accomplishment. He does not ask us to go to Chicago when there are no trains or planes or buses. Instead, He puts us on a Pullman with our baggage and our ticket. In other words, if He sets a goal for us to reach, we can be sure that there is a way to reach it. He does not ask us to do anything supernatural without providing the supernatural means for accomplishing it.

So, we come to another one of our keys to the third floor of the supernatural life. Since love of our enemies is a supernatural function, the supernatural means we must use to attain it are prayer, and particularly prayer during temptation. "Pray for those who persecute and calumniate you," says Our Lord (Matt. 5:44). Here is the little prayer for moments of temptation which we call the key to love of our enemies. It is this: "Lord, make him happy, here and hereafter." Let us say it again—"Lord, make him happy, here and hereafter." If, for example, there is a Sister who has hurt us, or injured us in any way, anyone who annoys us, or toward whom we have an antipathy, whenever we see her or are tempted to think or speak unkindly about her, say this little prayer, "Lord, make her happy, here and hereafter." That is real Christian forgiveness, from the heart. In this prayer, we not only will her, but positively ask God to give her, all the happiness He wants her to have, both in this life and in heaven.

This is the charity which was practiced by St. Thérèse, the Little Flower, to such an eminent degree. One instance in her life touches on this very point. We will let her tell it herself. She relates: "Formerly a holy nun of our community was a constant source of annoyance to me: the devil must have had something to do with this trial, for undoubtedly it was he who made me see so many disagreeable points about her. Unwilling to yield to my natural antipathy, I remembered that charity ought not merely to exist in the heart, but

also to show itself in deeds; so I endeavored to treat this Sister as I should my most cherished friend. Whenever I met her I prayed for her, at the same time offering to God her virtues and her merits…I did not rest satisfied with praying earnestly for this Sister who gave me such occasions for self-mastery, but I tried also to render her as many services as I could; and when tempted to make a disagreeable answer, I made haste to smile and change the subject of conversation…The outcome of all this was that she said to me one day, with a beaming countenance: "Tell me, Soeur Thérèse, what is it that attracts you to me so strongly? I never meet you without being welcomed with your most gracious smile'" (*Autobiography*, p. 168). So complete was this victory of hers that Marie, her eldest sister, took her to task for loving this particular Religious more than herself and the other Sisters.

Of course, such a victory was not won overnight. St. Thérèse could not do such a thing, and neither can we. The habit of loving our enemies, as Christ did, and as He would have us do, can only be acquired by repeated resolutions and repeated actions. Here we go again, dear Brothers and Sisters. Same tune, different lyrics. No vague generalities in resolutions will ever accomplish the results for which we are looking. Our resolutions must be as particular as possible, with regard to person, time, and place. If it is Brother X. who always irritates me and annoys me at recreation, then my resolution must be that *tonight*, at *recreation*, when Brother X. arouses my indignation by what he does or says, I am going to say to myself: "Dear Lord, make him happy, here and hereafter." Or, today, when I am in a discussion, and Sister N. interrupts or contradicts me, as she does so often, I am going to say: "Lord, make her happy, here and hereafter." Again, today, whenever I think of so and so who injured me gravely by having me unjustly changed or having my work changed, I am going to say: "Lord, make her happy, here and hereafter."

Now, once more the chorus arises, "How can you do that when you don't feel like it? That is the last thing in the world I could bring myself to do—to pray for them." But here, again, we might refer to

the chapter on obedience and the subsequent chapters of this book where the question of feelings has been discussed. Love of our enemies is not a question of feelings. St. Francis de Sales says: "If I am told that someone has spoken ill of me, or that I am being opposed in some way, in an instant anger flames up, and every vein swells as the hot blood mounts; but if amidst all this I turn to God, making an act of charity for the person who has offended me, there is no sin. I say, even if a thousand kinds of thoughts should rise up against this person, and not for the space of one day, but of several, provided that from time to time I disavow them, there is nothing wrong at all, for it is not in my power to check these feelings" (*The Spiritual Conferences*, p. 126).

It should be apparent by this time that our feelings in the matter are not important. The whole question of virtue and love of God is in our will. If we will to say the little prayer for our enemies, that is all that is necessary. We can will in contradiction to and in spite of our feelings. And we repeat here what was said before, that all God asks is our effort. If we take the first toddling steps, and keep faithful in our daily resolution to use the little key in particular instances which we have tried to foresee; if we examine ourselves on its fulfillment, and re-resolve it for the next day; then, after a while, God will lift us up and carry us along in swift strides toward our goal. After a while, if we keep on willing ourselves to say, "Lord, make her happy, here and hereafter," God will work such a change in our hearts that we will even *feel* like saying the prayer. He will scrape away all the festering matter of resentment and chagrin that we have let accumulate in our hearts and thereby stunt our spiritual growth. We will find ourselves at a point where our habitual and spontaneous reactions toward anyone who annoys or hurts us or injures us will be to say, almost without reflection, "Lord, make him happy, here and hereafter."

At that point, we will have reached a stage of charity where no one and no thing will ever really disturb us or destroy our peace of mind or happiness. We will be well established in our home on the

third floor of faith and charity, where happiness reigns and love is all that matters. And the key to that home, again, is this: in any situation where there is a person toward whom I have an antipathy, a person who has hurt me, insulted me, injured me, or who annoys me in any way whatever—at the moment of temptation, I shall say the little prayer: "Lord, make him happy, here and hereafter," or "Lord, make her happy, here and hereafter."

7. Mass and Communion

Thus far, we have seen that our purpose in life is to be as saints, to live the supernatural life on this earth. "This is the will of God, your sanctification" (1 Thess. 4:3). "You therefore are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). "He who is just, let him be just still; and he who is holy, let him be hallowed still" (Apoc. 22:11). We have seen that at baptism we received that share in the very life of God Himself which we call sanctifying grace. To grow and increase in this life is the whole purpose of our existence upon this earth, and the measure of grace that is in us at the moment of death is the measure of our capacity to enjoy the happiness of God in heaven and to glorify God forever.

We saw, also, that we live this supernatural life and grow in it through two chief ways or means: first, through prayer, Mass, and the sacraments, and second, through imitation of Christ, who alone, of all men, lived perfectly this supernatural life. We have dwelt at some length upon the imitation of Christ in His obedience and His threefold love of the poor, of the cross, and of His enemies. There remains now to treat of the two greatest means of increasing the supernatural life within us, the Mass and the sacraments. The treatment of the sacraments here will be confined specifically to the greatest of them all, the sacrament of the Most Holy Eucharist, which, as such, is inextricably bound up with the Mass.

It is sometimes said that too many Religious are Communion-minded rather than Mass-minded. In their teaching, they stress fre-

quent Communion, but they do not stress sufficiently the value of assisting at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. If this be true, it is because these Religious do not realize the intimate connection between Holy Communion and the Mass. The two are completely bound up with one another. To assist at Mass without receiving Communion, while it is sufficient to satisfy our obligation, is still a limping and incomplete action. It is like attending a banquet without eating. Again, to receive Communion, under normal conditions, without assisting at Mass, is like eating a banquet without the proper preparation. Now, it is true that if the sacrament is validly confected, we receive the Body and Blood of our Lord whenever we receive Holy Communion. But it is the mind of the Church that Communion should be received during, and as part of, the Mass, unless this should be impossible because of extraordinary circumstances.

Hence, to stress Holy Communion apart from assisting at Mass, or to stress assisting at Mass without Holy Communion, is to act foreign to the mind of the Church. In his decree on the reception of daily Communion, Pope Pius X says: "The Council of Trent, bearing in mind the immeasurable treasures of divine grace which are obtained by the faithful who receive the most holy Eucharist, says, 'The Sacred Synod desires that the faithful assisting at daily Mass should communicate, not only by spiritual affection, but also by the sacramental reception of the Eucharist.' These words clearly show the wish of the Church that all the faithful should be daily refreshed at this celestial banquet, and draw therefrom more abundant fruits of sanctification. This is in evident harmony with the wish by which Christ our Lord was moved when He instituted the Divine Sacrament. For not once, and not obscurely, but by frequent repetition, He inculcates the necessity of eating His flesh and drinking His blood, particularly in the words: 'This is the bread that came down from heaven. Not as your fathers did eat manna and are dead. He that eateth this bread shall live forever.'"

The logicality of the Church in insisting on this conjunction of the Mass and Holy Communion will be seen in the considerations on

the Mass which we are about to present. Now, there are many ways in which the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass can be examined. Many volumes have been written upon it. It is a subject that is inexhaustible. Not all the books that could be written upon the Mass have been written, "but if every one of these should be written, not even the world itself, I think, could hold the books that would have to be written" (John 21:25).

However, it would seem to be most profitable to consider the Mass as Christ, Our Lord, spoke of it at the time He instituted it. At that time, He called it the covenant of the new law. On Holy Thursday night in the Cenacle, where He fulfilled the promise He had made at Capharnaum, as He gave the chalice of His Most Precious Blood to His apostles, He said to them, "This is my blood of the new covenant, which is being shed for many" (Mark 14:24). The new covenant, He called it.

Now, a covenant, as we know, is a contract or a bargain, a sign of mutual agreement between two or more persons. It involves a present union of some kind between the parties and signifies something to be fulfilled in the future. For example, if two men bet on the Army-Notre Dame football game, they sometimes shake hands as a confirmation of the bet. They are united now, in the present, by their handshake, a symbol of something they will fulfill in the future, the payment of the wager. A written contract is a covenant. The present union of the wills is signified by the signatures of the parties affixed to the contract, which specifies what is to be fulfilled in the future. Long before the days of written contracts, men about to enter a covenant would prick a finger and squeeze a drop of blood into a bowl of water. Then each would partake of a sip of the water, thereby bringing about their union in the present, again signifying something to be fulfilled in the future. The Passover, the killing and eating of the paschal lamb, was a sign of God's covenant with the Jewish people to lead them into the promised land (cf. Exodus 12:25).

Thus, the Council of Trent, in its definitions concerning the institution of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, says: "Having celebrated

the ancient Passover, which the multitude of the children of Israel immolated in memory of their going out of Egypt, He instituted the new Passover, namely Himself to be immolated, under visible signs, by the Church through (the ministry of) priests, in memory of His own passage from this world unto the Father" (Sess. XXII, Cap. I). Why did He institute the Sacrifice of the Mass? The Council of Trent goes on to give these reasons: "...that He might leave to His own beloved Spouse the Church a visible sacrifice, such as the nature of man requires, whereby the bloody sacrifice, once to be accomplished on the cross might be represented, and the memory thereof remain even unto the end of the world, and its salutary virtue be applied to the remission of those sins which we daily commit...and that by means thereof this is effected, that we obtain mercy, and find grace" (*Ibid*. Cap. I & II).

It will be profitable to examine more closely these stupendous words of the sacred Council. First of all, who is it, according to the Council, that offers this august sacrifice and covenant? The new passover is to be offered, say the Fathers of the Council, "by the Church." Therefore, it is the whole Church that offers the Mass. Now, the Church is not merely the Pope, nor the Pope and the bishops, nor even the hierarchy and the priests. The Church is Christ and His members, the Mystical Body of Christ. So, then, the first and primary offerer of the Mass is Christ, the great High Priest. But Christ does not offer this sacrifice alone. Because the members of His Body are incorporated in Him in baptism, whenever He exercises His ministry, they all act with Him according to their participation in His priestly office. There are, of course, varying degrees of participation in this priesthood of Christ. Next to Christ, it is the priest, who by his official position, holds first place. But it is not the priest alone who offers the Mass. All the members of the Church also offer it in intention with the priest. Priest and people offer it together.

By what means is the Mass offered? Again, the Council says that it is offered "through the ministry of priests." The priest is the or-

dained representative of the people. The people, alone, cannot offer the Mass. It must be done through the ministry of priests. The priest is the divinely-appointed, ordained, and necessary spokesman for the Church. It is he through whom the Mass is offered in the name of the whole Church which comprises himself and all the members of the Mystical Body of Christ. "For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in the things pertaining to God, that he may offer gifts and sacrifices for sins" (Heb. 5:1). So, then, in the Mass, it is the Church—that is, Christ, the priest, *and* the people—that does the offering, but the offering is made through the ministry of the priests.

Now we may ask what is offered in the Mass? Again, according to the Council of Trent, it is Christ, Himself, who is offered—"namely Himself to be immolated under visible signs." That, of course, means the whole Christ, both His physical body and His Mystical Body, for Christ is not divided. And just as we share in His priesthood and its exercise, so, too, we are one with Him in His role as victim. Therefore, in the Mass, when He offers Himself and we offer Him as well, so, too, He offers us and we offer ourselves with Him. "As the Church," says St. Augustine, "is the body of this Head (Christ), through Him she learns to offer herself" (*City of God*, Bk. X, Cap. XX). So, then, in the Mass, there is offered to God the whole Christ, both His physical body and His Mystical Body, which is made up of all the members of the Church.

The point to be emphasized is that the Mass is not something that we hear, or something that is read, or at which we are present. It is essentially an *action* in which, according to the mind of the Church, we are to take part. Furthermore, it is one of the most important actions that we can perform. In the Mass we come to offer Christ and ourselves to God as a gift. Since, then, the Mass is so important, it behooves us to perform this action as the Church would have us do it. The teaching of the Church is that when we are present at Mass, we should assist *in* the Mass; that is, we should take an *active* part in it.

Now, essential participation in the Mass involves three things: offertory, consecration, and communion. Notice carefully that we are not speaking here of what the theologians call the essential parts of the Mass, itself. We are treating of essential *participation* in the Mass on the part of the people. So, we will discuss briefly each of these three phases of active assistance in the Mass, namely: offertory, consecration, and communion.

First in order comes the offertory, the time in the Mass which is devoted to the preparation of the victim of the sacrifice. At that time, the priest is preparing the matter which is to become the physical body of Christ, which will be offered as a gift to God at the consecration. At that time, we, as co-offerers with the priest, should be preparing the matter for our part of the offering, namely, ourselves as members of Christ's Mystical Body. There are two stages to this preparation of ourselves to be offered as a gift to God along with the body and blood of His Divine Son. The first stage is negative, so to speak. It is negative in this sense, that it consists in the saying of an act of contrition at least, whereby we turn aside from sin and creatures as completely as we can, in order to make ourselves spotless victims to be offered to God. Of course, it is understood that if there is any question of grave sin since the last confession, it is necessary to receive sacramental absolution before receiving Holy Communion.

Then comes the positive part of our preparation. The signal for this might well be when the priest pours a few drops of water into the wine in the chalice. For this mixing of the water with the wine is very significant. The Council of Trent in its teaching says: "The holy Synod notices, in the next place, that it has been enjoined by the Church on priests to mix water with the wine that is to be offered in the chalice, as well because it is believed that Christ the Lord did this, as also because from His side there came out blood and water, the memory of which mystery is renewed by this commixture; and, whereas in the Apocalypse of blessed John, the *peoples* are called *waters*, the union of that faithful people with Christ their head is

hereby represented" (Sess. XII, Cap. VII). So, at the pouring of the water into the wine, we try to unite ourselves as closely as we can to our Head by trying to put on the mind of Christ. In other words, we try to see just what it is in our lives that most estranges us from being completely Christ-like. What is it that keeps us from going the whole way with Christ, and, therefore, from being a perfect gift to offer God. At this point in the Mass, we might well think of our resolutions to imitate Christ in His obedience and in His love of the poor, of the cross, and of His enemies. It is those very attachments or faults or sins which are most predominant, for which we must have especial sorrow, that we should have in mind when we offer ourselves to God at the consecration.

For at the consecration of the Mass, the priest changes the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, and makes a gift of them to God. At that moment, we should, united to Christ, make a complete gift of ourselves to God as part of Christ's Mystical Body. We should tell God that we offer ourselves to Him completely. We should offer, not just our sorrows and our crosses, but also our joys and hopes and aspirations, all that we are and all that we have. "Here I am, God. Take me and do with me what you will!" We should make a complete gift of ourselves to Him, to do His will, both actively and passively. That means that we must promise Him that we will do, as best we can, all that we know to be His will, and that we will accept without complaint or murmur whatever He permits to happen to us. Like Mary at the foot of the Cross, we thus have made the complete sacrifice and are sharing in Christ's passion and death through the immolation and death of our own will.

Of course, by itself, the gift of our life to God is of little worth. Anything that we might do in the longest lifetime could be accomplished by God in an instant and in a million other ways. But when the gift of ourselves to God is united with the gift of the body and blood of His Son in the Sacrifice of the Mass, it takes on tremendous value. No matter when or where we make an offering of ourselves to God, it is nowhere so valuable or so pleasing to Him as when we are

assisting in the Mass.

But, however generous and sincere our promises at the consecration might be, it must often occur to us how little capable we are, by ourselves, of keeping them. Our past experience makes us painfully aware of this. But God in His goodness gives us the means to keep our promise, by coming to us, Himself, with all His strength at Communion time. In return for the gift we have made of ourselves to Him, He then gives Himself to us. He comes to us, into our very hearts, to give us the supernatural help and aid we need if we are to love Him as we ought, and so fulfill our promises. Now, at Communion time, we are with God, and God is with us. We are united to God.

Behold the covenant! This is the covenant of the new law. We see now the present union between God and us. God is actually within us in the closest possible union. And what does this present union or covenant signify for the future? In the words of St. Thomas, it is a "pledge of the glory to come." The Council of Trent, echoing the words of St. Thomas, says that, "He (Christ) would furthermore have it be a pledge of our glory to come, and everlasting happiness" (Sess. XIII, Cap. II). In the early days of the Church, the Mass was celebrated only on Sundays in honor of the resurrection of Our Lord, and as a pledge of our own resurrection. On Good Friday, Christ conquered sin; and on Easter Sunday, He conquered the wages of sin, which is death—by rising from the dead.

It is to the Eucharist that we owe the future resurrection of our bodies. Christ, Himself, and many of the Fathers of the Church taught this specifically. "Your fathers ate the manna in the desert and have died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that if anyone eat of it, he will not die. I am the living bread that has come down from heaven. If anyone eat of this bread he shall live forever" (John 6:49-52). "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has life everlasting and I will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:55). We will all reassume these bodies of ours on the last day, whether for glory or for eternal punishment. If we unite ourselves in

Holy Communion with the glorious risen body of Christ, we make a covenant, a bargain with Christ that He will not leave our bodies in corruption, but will raise them glorified with all the qualities of His risen body. St. Ignatius of Antioch calls the Eucharist the "medicine of immortality." And St. Irenaeus says, "Our bodies having received the Eucharist are no longer corruptible, but have the hope of resurrection" (Adv. Haer., lib. IV, cap. 18). So, as often as we assist in the Mass, we renew our covenant with God about our future resurrection in glory.

But there are, also, many other wondrous effects of this union with God which we achieve in assisting in the Mass. The first and greatest is that, if we are intimately and vitally united with Christ through sanctifying grace, this supernatural life is increased in us at every worthy reception of the sacrament. The divine life of God, Himself, is communicated to us, the life which the Son and the Holy Spirit live in common with the Father. It is the community of the divine life which makes all Christians one. "I in them," said Our Lord after the Last Supper, "and thou in me; that they may be made perfect in one" (John 17:23). This is the reason why Our Lord promises that he who receives the Eucharist will abide in Christ as Christ abides in him. At the moment when we have received Christ worthily in Holy Communion, we have, for the time being at least, fulfilled the purpose of our existence, which is union with God.

In addition to this increase of sanctifying grace, and union with Christ, we also receive at Holy Communion what is called the sacramental grace of the Eucharist. Each sacrament, as is well known, besides giving sanctifying grace, produces an effect—called sacramental grace—which is peculiar to the sacrament itself. St. Thomas Aquinas says sacramental grace is a "certain divine help to attain the end of the sacrament" (*Summa Theologiae,* III, Q. 62, Art. 2). The end of the sacrament of the Eucharist is union with Christ by charity. The sacramental grace of the Eucharist, therefore, is a special help for the attainment of that union with God which the theologians call the "fervor of charity."

To explain this more fully, it should be recalled that in Chapter 2 it was said that at Baptism we receive the infused supernatural virtue of charity. This infused virtue is a potency or ability to perform supernatural acts of love of God and of our neighbor. If anyone has, by practice, turned this potency into an actuality, if by repeated acts he has developed this ability so that he regards God as the final end to which all his actions must be directed, we say that he has the operative habit or virtue of charity. Very likely such a person is not always thinking of God specifically. He doesn't always "actually" direct his actions to God. But from constant practice, he has such an habitual attitude toward God that, if any action occurred or suggested itself to him which he knew to be contrary to God's pleasure, he would immediately and spontaneously reject it. Such a state is called "habitual charity."

In other words, such a one can be likened to little children busy with their play, who do not consciously think of their mother, but who, when something wrong is suggested by their companions, automatically react and say, "No, I may not do that. Mother would not want me to." This concept of habitual conformity to the will of another was beautifully expressed in a poem by the Rev. Charles L. O'Donnell, C.S.C., called "*Among His Own* (In a Children's Chapel)." Father O'Donnell writes:

> He lives among His own, the children's God:
> Above and by and round Him hourly pass
> Their hurrying feet; down hall or stairs, a pause,
> And in the hush outside a knee is bent
> In silent adoration of the Guest.
> The Guest? Ah, no! The very Host is He,
> And they the dwellers in His mansioned Heart.
> For them the day is full of work and play,
> Of ringing sounds, of mirth and little griefs
> That brim a little soul; and they forget
> The awful Presence, as the child forgets
> His mother when the day is very full,
> Forgets her in the mind, not in the will.

For though they come and go, and laugh and shout,
At nightfall, when the spirit's eyes are wide,
And conscience looks across the vanished hours,
They find, what all the day contented Him,
They have not left the path He'd have them tread;
His arms were 'neath them, and His voice was heard
In all the secret councils of their deeds.
And when they fall asleep they hold His hand.

But, beyond acting from habitual charity, there are moments in the lives of all of us who are at all sincere when we "actually" and with explicit intention do what we do for God. We think of Him at the moment we start work, and all the while we are working. We actually do think of Him as the source of all good and the One for whom we are living and working. This conscious referring of our actions to God is what is called the "fervor of charity." That is, when we have the fervor of charity, we live with an actually present intention of pleasing God our Father. However, most of us will admit, with a moan of regret, that such moments in our lives are too woefully few. There have been saints whose fervor of charity was such that it was almost habitual. But for most of us, it has been at rare moments, as at a retreat, or during a burst of zeal, or after some particular grace from God, that we have been able to work for Him even for a brief moment with that fervor of charity which moved St. Paul to exclaim, "The love of Christ impels us" (2 Cor. 5:14).

It is this fervor of charity which is the end toward which the sacramental grace of the Eucharist is directed. Its purpose is to help us attain more and more the fervor of charity—to live more and more in the presence of God, and to act with the positive intention of pleasing Him in all things. Just as daily association with Christ while He was on earth inflamed His followers with enthusiasm for Him, so much so that they followed Him into the desert without thought of food or provisions, so, too, from the reception of the same Christ, and from union with Him in a more intimate way than was possible to any of His followers in His public life, we receive the grace to love Him more fervently and to live more and more for Him alone.

In giving us the grace to increase the fervor of charity, and in strengthening the supernatural life within us, the Eucharist also preserves us from future sin. Thus, the Council of Trent has declared that: "He (Christ) would also that this sacrament should be received as the spiritual food of our souls, whereby may be fed and strengthened those who live with His life who said, 'He that eateth Me, the same also shall live by me,' and as an antidote, whereby we may be freed from daily faults, and be preserved from mortal sins" (Sess. XIII, Cap. II). The decree of the Sacred Congregation of the Council, December 20, 1905, tells us that: "The desire of Jesus Christ and of the Church that all the faithful should daily approach the sacred banquet is directed chiefly to this end, that the faithful, being united to God by means of the Sacrament, may thence derive strength to resist their sensual passions, to cleanse themselves from the stains of daily faults, and avoid those graver sins to which human frailty is liable; so that its primary purpose is not that the honor and reverence due to our Lord may be safeguarded, or that the Sacrament may serve as a reward of virtue bestowed on the recipients. Hence, the Council of Trent calls the Eucharist the antidote whereby we are delivered from daily faults and preserved from deadly sins."

In the light of all these marvelous effects of this wonderful sacrament, we may ask ourselves: "If all this is true, why am I not better? Why have I not made more improvement after so many years of assisting at Mass and receiving Holy Communion? I am still so attached to trivialities. There is so little of mortification in my life, and not much of idealism. I still yield so easily to resentment and hurt feelings. I find myself jealous and irritable and impatient and disobliging. I frown and am ill-humored if something upsets my plans." If we can say any of these things of ourselves, if we find no change, no betterment, no serious effort at self-conquest, if there is no progress in virtue, then the fault lies not in the Mass, nor in the power of Christ in Holy Communion, but in our own heart and dispositions. He comes in all His fullness to everyone, in each Holy Communion. To trace the difficulty, we should recall the idea of the

Mass as a covenant with almighty God. Apparently, our covenant with Him has not been complete. At the consecration of the Mass we offered ourselves *completely* to Him. At least we said we did. We told Him that we would do His will completely, both actively and passively, that we would do what He wanted and accept graciously whatever He permitted to happen to us. But did we truly mean it?

Did we really intend to get rid of that inordinate attachment? Were we truly resolved to stop being unfaithful to His grace? Was it our firm intention to do something about our antagonism for that certain other companion? Did we mean it when we said we would stop being uncharitable about the Superior? Did we really intend to overcome that annoyance and uncharitableness toward that Religious who is under our jurisdiction?

The trouble frequently is that we approach the Eucharistic table of the Lord with a heart divided. We want the lion's share for ourselves. We try to bargain with God in petty ways. So, because we give ourselves to God only partially, He gives Himself to us only partially. We keep back part of ourselves in our offering and, consequently, do not receive the fullness of the fruits of Communion. Once again, it comes down to our aim in life. Do we want to *feel* good, *look* good, or *be* good? Are we living on the first floor of sensualism, the second floor of reason, or the third floor of faith? Are we thinking of "me" again? Are we selfishly keeping back part of ourselves, or do we think first of God, and of His holy will?

If we are generous, and think of God first, if we make our offering complete, and sincerely mean to get rid of any deliberate attachment to venial sin, then great effects will surely follow from our Masses and Communions. Assisting in the Mass will be like firing a boiler. The love in our hearts will burst into action at the right moment. Real love of Christ will develop in our hearts and souls. It will not be merely a question of sentimental and pious feelings, but of real strength of will. That is the ultimate test of the effectiveness of our Communions. Just as the value of prayer lies not in what one feels but in what one does, so, too, we must judge the effects of our

Communions by what they do to our character and our actions. "By their fruits you will know them" (Matt. 7:20). "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matt. 12:34). This is the test of our sanctity and our love that Christ will apply to us.

The effects of our Communions may not be measured by the pious sentiments we experience during our thanksgiving, nor by the way we fold our hands or cast down our eyes, nor by the length of time we kneel straight and motionless. Neither are the effects of Communion measured accurately by the fervor of the vocal prayers and protestations of love that we may make after Communion. The real test is: how do we act? A case is reported of two Sisters kneeling piously, making thanksgiving after Communion, and then getting up and arguing violently over the question of which one would accompany the priest with Communion to the infirmary. Again, it has also been reported that upon leaving the chapel after Mass, one Brother refused to pass the holy water to another Brother. Such conduct, of course, shows that the Religious concerned have failed Our Lord in Communion. It is to be wondered what sort of offering such Religious make of themselves at the consecration of the Mass.

This much is certain. If our day-by-day assistance in the Mass does not result in a daily improvement in our charitableness, in our willingness to forgive, in our forgetfulness of self, in our desire to live for others, in our concern for the happiness of others, in our eagerness to help others, then, there is something wrong in our use of this glorious means which God has put at our disposal. We are not achieving the purpose for which He gave it to us, and we are not achieving that purpose because of our own faulty approach to the Mass.

God's gift of Himself to us in the Mass is conditioned by our gift of ourselves to Him. The more we are forgetful of ourselves and of our own will, the more He will remember us and think of us. Above all, it is charity that we should think of at the Mass. There is nothing that can so stop up the flow of grace through the sacramental channel of the Eucharist as deliberate faults against charity. Any deliber-

ately-harbored resentment or willful coolness toward others dams the flow of grace which God intends to come to us in each Communion. There must be no antagonisms, no hates. "If thou art offering thy gift at the altar and there rememberest that thy brother has anything against thee, leave thy gift before the altar and go first to be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Matt. 5:23-24).

It is true to say that we cannot continue to assist in the Mass in the right dispositions, making a generous and complete offering of ourselves as we renew our covenant with God, without getting better. But we must burn into our minds this fact: the fruits of our Communion depend upon and are conditioned by our consecration, the giving of ourselves to God. Our consecration is dependent upon our offertory in which we prepare ourselves as victims to be offered to God. And our offertory is conditioned by our morning meditation. One of the prime considerations of our morning meditation should be the question: how is our will toward God and toward our neighbor? If there is anything wrong in our attitude or our will toward God or any of His children, it can most effectively, most surely, and most quickly be remedied by our participating actively, generously, and sincerely not at but *in* the Mass.

8. The Key Ring

What this book has been trying to make clear is that the essence of the spiritual life in practice is not something extremely complicated. Frequently, in reading spiritual books, we become so enmeshed in a multiplicity of virtues and their degrees and divisions that we cannot see the forest because of the trees. St. Thérèse, the Little Flower of Jesus, was aware of this and commented on it. "Sometimes," she wrote, "when I read books in which perfection is put before us with the goal obstructed by a thousand obstacles, my poor little head is quickly fatigued. I close the learned treatise which tires my brain and dries up my heart, and I turn to the Sacred Scriptures. Then all becomes clear and lightsome" (*Autobiography*, p. 372).

In the Scriptures, St. Thérèse could read and understand the simple and beautiful story of God's love for her. There, too, we can learn the story of God's love for us. So great is that love, that if ours were the only soul in the world that needed redeeming, He would go through His whole passion and death again, just to save us. So good is God to us that He has merited for us the supernatural life received at Baptism. He gives us the means for growing in that life, to increase our capacity to glorify Him and enjoy His happiness forever in heaven. It is as if a mother, on her birthday, were to give her little girl a dollar to go out and buy her a present. When the little girl has spent the dollar on the gift of her choice, she comes home and proudly tells everyone, "Look at what I bought for mommy!" This

when she could have given mommy nothing, if mommy had not given her the means. So, too, God has given us everything that we have. In His goodness, He is pleased to praise and reward us for using, in His honor, everything that He has given us. By ourselves, like the little girl, we could do nothing. But God, so to speak, plays a game with us, His little children, and pretends that we have done something wonderful. Then He gives us an eternal reward for doing it.

Once we are convinced of God's immense love for us and His tremendous goodness to us, the most important thing in our lives is an insatiable desire to show Him our love in return. To such realization of this did St. Thérèse come that on her deathbed, on the very evening of her agony, she could say in summing up her whole life, "Love is the only thing that matters" (*Novissima Verba*, p. 184).

If this is so, if love is the only thing that matters, then the important point for clarification for us is this: precisely what does it mean to love God? How can we tell if we love God? After all, this is what we all profess to do in our religious life, and therefore it is absolutely essential that we have a very clear concept of what we mean by loving God. It is suggested that the readers pause for a moment at this point and see if they can formulate for themselves a clear and precise and practical and workable definition of the essence of love of God. What is it that they are trying to do in their religious life? What is it that makes love of God—love? It is strange how often we use this term without having a clear picture of its meaning—love—in our minds.

Perhaps someone will say that the very essence of love of God is perfection. That is true, but what, then, is the essence of perfection? Is it sanctity? That is true, but what, then, is the essence of sanctity? If someone says that the essence of sanctity is holiness, then, what is the essence of holiness? Say that the essence of holiness is charity. What, then, is the essence of charity? Have we yet come to the very core of the matter so that we may distinguish love of God from everything else in the world? That is what we must do if we are to have a true definition.

The essence of love of God consists in a union of wills—the union of our will with His will, for love is an act of the will. The more perfectly our will is united to God's will, the more perfectly they are in harmony, the more do we love Him. In heaven, our will will be completely united to and in conformity with the divine will of God, and we will have reached perfection, we will have attained sanctity, and holiness, and complete charity. Here on earth, we love God, we achieve sanctity, holiness, and charity to the precise extent that our will is united to and in conformity with God's will.

It is not affective love or feelings that are in question now. Affections and feelings toward God are wonderful to have, and we should be grateful to Him for giving them to us at those moments in our lives when we do experience them. But they are merely gratuitous gifts of God which He only occasionally bestows on certain souls. The real test of our love of God comes precisely when we are absolutely devoid of all affection and feeling toward Him. Can we go on at times like these, uniting our will completely to God's will? If so, then we are loving Him truly for Himself and not for the personal satisfaction that we get from His consolations. It was to this situation of complete desolation and lack of consolation and affections that the Saints referred when they spoke of "the dark night of the soul."

The love of God of which we are speaking, and it is the only true love of God, is *effective* love. It is not loving Him in words or in feeling but in deed. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of my Father in heaven shall enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 7:21). Our Divine Lord said, again, "By their fruits you will know them" (Matt. 7:20). And, again, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matt. 12:34). So, then, it is the active union of our will with His that determines the love of God which we are professedly seeking in the religious life.

How, then, can we be sure that our wills are united to the will of God? In other words, how can we be sure that we love God? To as-

sist us in answering this question, there is here presented in summary form, on one key ring, so to speak, all the keys to the third floor of faith and hope and love of God which have been proposed throughout this book.

Loving God, in brief, means two things: first, actively, we do whatever we know He wants us to do; and passively, we graciously accept whatever He permits to happen to us as coming from the loving hands of our Father. The test of our active conformity with God's will lies in our attitude toward our work and toward the poor and toward our enemies. As for our work, in imitation of the obedience of Christ and in union with Him, we do what we have to do, when we have to do it, in the best way we can. We do this, day after day, hour after hour, without complaint, because such is most pleasing to God, Our Father. We do it in spite of distaste and fatigue and disappointment, knowing that whatever is assigned to us by legitimate authority is God's will for us, that loving Him means that we will for ourselves what He wills.

The key to imitation of Christ in His love of the poor, His especial friends, is twofold: first, give to all those who ask of us. Be ready to give to anyone whatever we have of time or effort or help or possessions or company or sympathy. Let us live for others and be the kind of Religious that anyone can call on at any time for anything. If necessary, have a reputation for being God's simpleton. The second key to love of the poor is this: be especially kind to those we do not especially like. If we do this, then we know that there is nothing of our own will in our treatment of them. We are loving them solely for the sake of Christ, because it is His will, and not for any personal satisfaction or good feeling.

The key to love of our enemies upon which Christ was so insistent is this: whenever we see them or are tempted to think or speak or act unkindly toward them, we must keep repeating, as long as the temptation lasts, this little prayer, "Lord, make them happy, here and hereafter." This is true Christian forgiveness, for we not only wish, but actually pray that God will give them all the happiness that

He wants them to have, both in this life and the next.

The passive union of our will with God's will is what has been spoken of as love of the cross. Love of the cross consists in this, that we graciously accept whatever happens to us as coming from God's hands because it is pleasing to Him, and because by faith we know that it is best for us. The only way we can be certain that we are conforming our will to God's will is habitually to use the little key which was proposed, namely, to say "Thanks, God!" for whatever happens that we do not like. If we can say, "Thanks, God!" for what we do not like, then we are sure that there is nothing of our own will involved, that we are positively wanting whatever God wants for us simply because He wants it.

These, then, are the keys which, it is hoped, will help to make clearer and more attainable the practical, everyday living of the spiritual life. An attempt has been made to sketch a picture of what the spiritual life and the love of God look like in action. But, again, it must be insisted upon, all this is supernatural and so impossible to mere human nature. And since the object to be attained is supernatural, the means which are used must be proportionate to the end. Therefore they must be supernatural also. The means are at hand on every side of us: the Mass, the sacraments, prayer during temptation, spiritual reading, and so on through all the spiritual exercises of our day. But again let it be noted that all these things are only means, and we must not confuse them with their ends. Such confusion will be fatal. The purpose of the sacraments, and our spiritual reading, the Holy Scriptures, and the Rosary, and meditation, and retreat, and silence, and our rules—the purpose of all of these is to be the means of kindling the spark of charity in our hearts, so that when an opportunity presents itself for us to imitate Christ in His obedience or in His love of the poor, or the cross, or His enemies, we will do it spontaneously, and habitually, and cheerfully. *That* is the whole aim and end of our religious life.

It is a simple idea, but one not too simple of attainment. However, once we have a clear picture of precisely what it is we are seek-

ing, it will be so much easier. If we keep the means and end in their proper perspective, and use the means *as* means, with our eyes ever directed toward the end, we will begin to realize some of the happiness which our Lord promised to those who live by the Beatitudes. But we must remember that if we are to practice the Beatitudes, or in other words, if we are to imitate our Lord in His obedience and His love of the poor, the cross, and His enemies, then we must be living on the third floor of faith. We will not do it if we are living only on the first floor of passion or sensuality. We will not do it if we are living only on the second floor of reason or common sense. It is only when we habitually dwell on the third floor of the human house and live by faith and hope and charity that we can fulfill our vocation to the religious life as God intends us to fulfill it. There is always a vacant apartment up on the third floor. Let's move up! Here are the keys:

- Do a good job always, to please God.
- Give freely to all those who ask of you.
- Be especially kind to those you do not like.
- Pray for your enemies: "Lord, make her happy, here and hereafter."
- Say, "Thanks, God!" for what He sends that you do not like.

About the Author

Fr. Philip Dion (1910-1994) was born in Boston, Massachusetts. He enrolled at St. Joseph's Seminary in Princeton, New Jersey, in 1928. After two years, he was forced to leave due to tuberculosis and did not return until eight years later. He was finally ordained a priest of St. Vincent de Paul's *Congregatio Missionis* in 1941.

Not long afterwards, his widowed mother entered religious life, receiving her habit from her son's hands in 1948. She joined the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in Halifax, Nova Scotia, as Sr. Mary of St. Vincent de Paul.

As a priest, Fr. Dion spent time teaching at Niagara University, at St. John's University in New York City (Academic Dean from 1952-1954), at the mother house of the Daughters of Charity in Emmitsburg, Maryland, at St. Joseph's College (Chairman of the Board), and at the Seminary of Our Lady of the Angels in Albany, New York (Academic Dean in 1961).

Fr. Dion was a gifted teacher and retreat master. He wrote five books and numerous articles and gave retreats in the USA, South America, and Asia.